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Science Fiction

ISAAC ASIMOV
Moving Ahead

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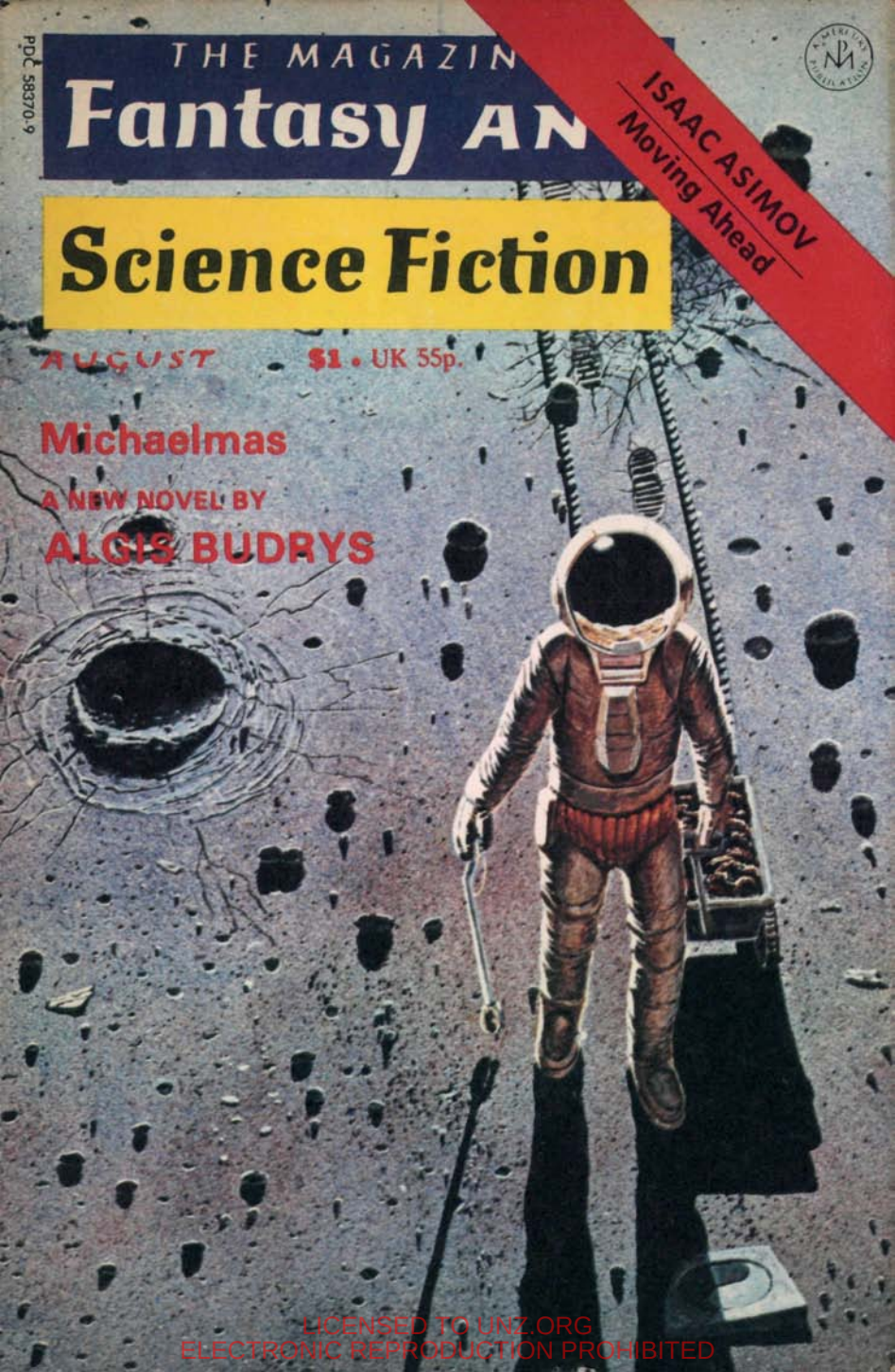
Michaelmas

A NEW NOVEL BY

ALGIS BUDRYS



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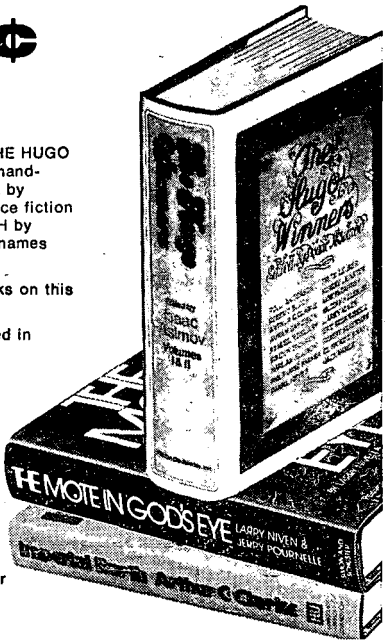

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Here it is, the first novel in more than ten years from Algis Budrys, author of Who?, The Falling Torch, The Amsirs and the Iron Thorn *and the classic* Rogue Moon. *It's an absorbing and fast-paced story about the most influential man in the world, a newscaster named Laurent Michaelmas.*

Michaelmas

(1st of 2 parts)

by ALGIS BUDRYS

When he was lonely as he was tonight, Laurent Michaelmas would consider himself in a dangerous mood. He would try to work himself out of it. He'd punch through the adventure channels and watch the holograms cavort in his room, noting how carefully the directors had seen to it there was plenty of action but room as well for the viewer. At times like this, however, perhaps he did not want to be carefully put out of the way of hurtling projectiles or sociopathic characters.

He would switch to the news channels, studying the techniques of competitors he thought he had something to learn from, noting the names of good directors and camera operators, storing up a reserve of compliments for his professional acquaintances when next he saw them.

After that, he would try the educational media; the good, classic dramas, and opera; documentaries; teaching aids — but the dramas were all in his head already, and he had all the news and most of the documentary data. If there was something he needed to know, Domino could always tell him quickly. It would pall.

When it did, as it had tonight, he would become restless. He would not go to the romance channels; that was not for him. He would instead admit that it was simply time again for him to be this way, and that from time to time it would always be this way.

With his eyes closed, he sat at the small antique desk in the corner and remembered what he had written many years ago.

Your eyes, encompassed full with love,

Play shining changes like the dance of clouds.

And I would have the summer rain of you

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In my eyes through
The dappled sunlight of our lives.

He put his head down on his arms for a moment.

But he was Laurent Michaelmas. He was a large-eyed man, his round, nearly hairless head founded on a short, broad jaw. His torso was thick and powerful, equipped with dextrous limbs and precisely acting hands and feet. In his public *persona,* he looked out at the world like an honest child of great capability. Had his lips turned down, the massive curve of his glistening scalp and the configuration of his jaw would have made him resemble a snapping turtle. But his audiences had never seen him that way; habitually, his mouth curved up in a reassuring smile.

Similarly when he moved, his swift feet in their glistening black shoes danced quickly and softly over parquet and sidewalk, up marble steps and along vinyl-tiled corridors, in and out of houses of commerce, universities, factories, places of government, in and out of ships, aircraft and banks. There was hardly anywhere in the world where his press credentials might not be expected to take him smiling and polite, reassuring, his flat black transceiving machine swinging from its strap over his shoulder.

Seated now, with his face reminiscing bleakly, the comm unit resting at his elbow, he was interrupted when one of the array of pinpoint pilot lights blinked. It was red. The machine's speakers simultaneously gave a premonitory pop. "Mr. Michaelmas."

The voice was reserved, the tone dry. Michaelmas turned toward the machine with friendly interest. "Yes, Domino."

"Reuters has a story that Walter Norwood is not dead. He is almost fully recuperated from long-term intensive treatment, and is fit to return to duty."

Laurent Michaelmas sat back in his chair, the jowls folding under his jaw, and raised one eyebrow. He steepled his fingertips. "You'd better give me that verbatim."

"Right. Berne, June 15. Walter Norwood alive and well, says two-time Nobel winner biochemist savant. Doktor Professor Nils Hannes Limberg announced here 0330 Berne time astronaut Walter Norwood, thought dead in March destruction his Sahara orbital shuttle, suffered extensive injuries in crash his escape capsule on Alpine peak near world-famous Limberg Sanatorium. Limberg states now that publicity, help, advice then from others would have merely interfered with proper treatment. Norwood now quote good as ever and news is being released at this earliest medically advisable time endquote. UN

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Astronautics Commission notified by Limberg just previous to this statement. UNAC informed Norwood ready to leave sanatorium at UNAC discretion. Limberg refers add inquires to UNAC and refuses media access to sanatorium quote at this time endquote. Bulletin ends. Note to bureau managers: We querying UNAC Europe. Reuters Afrique please query UNAC Afrique and send soonest. Reuters New York same UNAC there. Reuters International stand by. End all."

Laurent Michaelmas cocked his head and looked up and off at nothing. "Think it's true?"

"I think the way Limberg's reported to have handled it gives it a lot of verisimilitude. Very much in character from start to finish. Based on that, the conclusion is that Norwood is alive and well."

"Damn," Michaelmas said.

"Yes, Mr. Michaelmas?"

What do you have from the other media?"

"On the Norwood story?"

"Right. You'd better give it priority in all your information feeds to me until further notice."

"Understood. First, all the other news services are quoting Reuters to their stations and asking for matter. AP's Berne man reports no progress on the phone to Limberg, and can't get to the sanatorium — it's up on a mountain, and the only road is private. UPI is filing old tapes of Norwood, and of Limberg, with background stories on each and a recap of the shuttle accident. They have nothing — they're just servicing their subscribers with features and sidebars, and probably hoping they'll have a new lead soon. All the feature syndicates are doing essentially the same thing."

"What's Tass doing?"

"They're not releasing it at all. They've been on the phone to *Pravda* and Berne. *Pravda* is holding space on tomorrow's Page 3, and Tass's man in Berne is having just as much luck as the AP. He's predicting to his chief that Limberg'll announce a fullscale news conference soon; says it's not in character for the old man not to follow up on this teaser. I agree."

"Yes. What are the networks doing?"

"They've reacted sharply but are waiting on the wire services for details. The entertainment networks are having voice-over breaks with slides of Berne, the Oberland, or any snowy mountain; they're reading the bulletin quickly, and going to promos for their affiliated news channels. The news is tending to montages of stock shuttle-shot footage over stock visuals of the Jungfrau and the Finsteraarhorn. No one has any more data."

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"All right, I think we can let you handle all that. I'd say Doctor Limberg has dropped his bombshell and retreated to a previously prepared position to wait out the night. The next place to go is UNAC. What have you got?"

"UNAC Afrique had decided not to permit statements at any installation until an official statement has been prepared and released from there. A UNAC executive plane is clearing Naples for Berne at the moment with Josip Sakal aboard; he was vacationing there. The flight has not been announced to the press.

"UNAC Afrique's engineering staff has memoed all offices reiterating its original March evaluation that Norwood's vehicle was totally destroyed and nothing got clear. Obviously, UNAC people are being knocked out of bed everywhere to review their records."

Michaelmas's hands rubbed absently over the desk.

The hectoring voice of the machine went on. "UNAC Afrique has had a telephone call from Limberg's sanatorium. The calling party was identified as Norwood on voice, appearance, and conversational content. He substantiated the Limberg statement. He was then ordered to keep mum until Sakal and some staff people from Naples have reached him. All UNAC installations and offices were then sequestered by Afrique, as previously indicated, and the fact of the call from Norwood to UNAC has not been made available to the press."

"You've been busy." Michaelmas stood up and put his hands deep in his pockets, his shoulders bowed and stiff. He drifted slowly toward the window and looked out along Manhattan Island.

It was approximately ten minutes since Nils Limberg, who was a gaunt old man full of liver spots and blue veins, had spoken to the Reuters man in whatever language was most convenient for them. And now 2,000,000,000 waking people had had the opportunity to know what he had said, with more due to awaken to it. No one knew how many computers knew what he had said; no one knew how many microliths strained with it, how many teleprinters shook with it. Michaelmas looked out his window, with only a million or so people in his direct line of vision, and the fine hairs were standing up on his arms.

He shook his head and turned back to his machine. "Disregard all Norwood data beginning with the Reuters item. Do you think Norwood is alive?"

"No. All hope of finding him, alive or dead, is irrational. Norwood became part of a ball of high-temperature gases."

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"So your present opinion that Norwood lives is based purely on the Reuters item?"

"Right."

"Reuters doesn't usually get its facts wrong, and never lies. Dr. Limberg did make the statement, and he can't afford to lie."

"Correct."

"How do you envision Norwood's marvelous resurrection? What has happened to him?"

"I believe his trajectory in the capsule did end somewhere near Limberg's sanatorium. I assume he was gravely injured, if it has taken him all these months to recover even at Dr. Limberg's hands. Limberg's two prizes are after all for breakthroughs in controlled artificial cellular reproduction and for theoretical work on cellular memory mechanisms. It wouldn't surprise me to learn he practically had to grow Norwood a new body. That sort of reconstitution based on Limberg's publications over the years, is now nearly within reach of any properly managed medical center. I would expect Limberg himself to be able to do it now, given his facilities and a patient in high popular esteem. His ego would rise to the occasion like a butterfly to the sun."

"Is Norwood still the same man?"

"Assuming his brain is undamaged, certainly."

"Perfectly capable of leading the Outer Planets expedition after all?"

"Capable, but not likely to. He has missed three months of the countdown. Major Papashvilly must remain in command, so I imagine Colonel Norwood cannot go at all. It would be against Russian practice to promote their cosmonaut to the necessary higher rank until after the successful completion of the mission."

"What if something happened to Papashvilly?"

"Essentially the same thing has happened vis-a-vis Norwood. UNAC would assign the next backup man, and...."

Laurent Michaelmas grinned. "Horsefeathers."

There was a moment's pause, and the voice said slowly, considerredly: "You may be right. The popular dynamic would very likely assure Norwood's reappointment."

Michaelmas smiled coldly. He rubbed the top of his head. "Tell me—are you still confident that no one has deduced our—ah—personal dynamic?"

"Perfectly confident." Domino was shocked at the suggestion. "That would require a practically impossible order of integration. And I keep a running check. No one knows that we run the world."

"Does anyone know the world is being run?"

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"Now, that's another formulation. No one knows what's in the hearts of men. But if anyone's thinking that way, it's never been communicated. Except, just possibly, face to face. Which is meaningless until concerted action results. And that would require communication."

"That's a comfort," Michaelmas said softly.

There was another silence from the machine. "Tell me...."

"Anything."

"Why do you ask that in connection with your previous set of questions?"

Michaelmas's eyes twinkled as they often did when he found Domino trying to grapple with intuition. But not all of his customary insouciance endured through his reply. "Because we have just discovered that the very great Nils Hannes Limberg is a fraud and a henchman. That is a sad and significant thing. And because Norwood was as dead as yesterday. He was a nice young man with high, specialized qualifications no higher than those of the man who replaced him, and there was never anything secret or marvelous about him or you would have told me long ago. If we could have saved him, we would have. But there's nothing either you or I can do about a stuck valve over the Mediterranean, and frankly I'm just as glad there's some responsibility I don't have to take. If we could have gotten him back at the time, I would have been delighted. But he had a fatal accident, and the world has gone on."

He turned his face upward. That brought stars and several planets into his line of vision. "Something out there's unhappy with history. That means it's unhappy with what I've done. Something out there is trying to change history. That means it's groping toward me."

Michaelmas scratched his head. "Of course, you say it doesn't know it's got one specific man to contend with. It may thing it only has some seven billion people to push around. But one of these days, it'll realize. It's smarter than you and I, I'm afraid."

With asperity, Domino said: "Would you like a critique of the nonsequential assumptions in that set? As one example, you have no basis for that final evaluation. Your and my combined intellectual resources—"

"Domino, never try to reason with a man who can see the blade swinging for his head." He cocked that head again, Michaelmas did, and his wide, ugly face was quite elfin. "I'll have to think of something. Afterward, you can make common sense of it."

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II

"Well, I think I should be frightened," Michaelmas told Domino as he moved about the kitchen module preparing his evening meal. The chopped onions simmering in their wine sauce were softening toward a nice degree of tenderness, but the sauce itself was bubbling too urgently, and might over-thicken. He picked up the pan and shook it gently while passing it back and forth six inches above the flame. The filet of beef was browning quite well in its own skillet, yielding sensuously as he nudged it with his fork. "You don't grow an established personality from scratch. An artificial infant, now...why not? I'll give Limberg that; he could do it. And a clone physically identical with its parend—fine, if Limberg had ever taken cells from him. But a highly trained grown man with thirty-odd years behind him? Oh, no. That I won't give him."

"Norwood and Limberg never met. There's no record of any transmission of Norwood cells to any depository. No present system will permit complete biological and experiential reconstruction from data alone."

"And there you are," Michaelmas said. "Simplest thing in the world." He worked a dab of sauce between thumb and forefinger and then tasted them with satisfaction. He set the pan down on the shut-off burner, put a lid on it, and turned toward the table where the little machine lay with its pilot lamps mostly quiescent but sparkling with reflected room light. "It really is all very clear, Domino, if you disregard that balderdash about Norwood's surviving the explosion."

"Doctor Limberg is a first-rate genius—"

Michaelmas smiled shyly and mercilessly, but did not interrupt.

"—who could not possibly be living a double life. You're hypothesizing that this excellent mind has been participating for years in a gross deception upon the world. This cannot be true. If that had been his original purpose, he would have grown away from it and rebelled as his cover career began to assume genuine importance and direction. You can't oppose a dynamic — and I shouldn't be quoting your own basics back to you."

Michaelmas was smiling in approval through the marching words. "Quite right. Now let's just assume that Herr Doktor Professor N. Hannes Limberg biochemist savant is merely a smart man with a good library and access to a service that can supply techniques for making fresh people."

There was a perceptible pause. With benevolent interest, Michaelmas watched the not quite random

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pattern of rippling lights on the ostensible machine's surface. He served himself and began to eat.

"Humm," Domino said. "Assuming you're aware of the detail discontinuities in your exact statement and were simply leapfrogging them.... Well, yes, a competent actor with the proper vocabulary and reference library could live an imitation of genius. And a man supplied with a full-blown technique and the necessary instruments needs no prototype research or component purchases."

There was another pause, and Domino went on with obvious reluctance to voice the obvious.

"However, there has to be a pre-existing body of knowledge to supply the library, the equipment, and the undetected system for delivering these things. Practically, such an armamentarium could arise only from a fully developed society that has been in existence at least since Limberg's undergraduate days. No such society exists on Earth. The entire Solar System is clearly devoid of other intelligent life. Therefore, no such society exists within the ken of the human race."

"But not beyond the reach of its predictable intentions," Michaelmas said. "I assume you've been screening contract offers in connection with the Norwood item?"

"Yes. You've had a number of calls from various networks and syndicates. I've sold the byline prose rights. I'm holding three spoken-word offers for your decision. The remainder were outside your standards."

"Sign me for the one that offers me the most latitude for the money. I don't want someone thinking he's bought the right to control my movements. And tap into the UNAC management dynamic — edit a couple of interoffice memos as they go by. Stir up some generalized concern over Papashvilly's health and safety. Limberg's masters have taken a magnificent stride, but I don't see why my admiration has to blind me. I'm not Fate, after all."

III

His cabdriver recognized him on the way out to the airport and said: "S'pose you're on your way over to find out if Walt Norwood's really okay?" The airline gate clerk said: "I'm looking forward to your interviews with Colonel Norwood and Doctor Limberg. I never trust any of your competitors, Mr. Michaelmas." The stewardess who seated him was a lovely young lady whose eyes misted as she wondered if it was true about Norwood. For each of them, and for those fellow passengers who got up the courage to speak to him, he had disarming

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smiles and interested replies which somehow took away some of the intrusion of his holding up his machine to catch their faces and words. As they spoke to him, knowing that they might be part of a program, he admired them.

For him, it didn't seem an easy thing for a human being to react naturally when his most fleeting response was being captured like a dragonfly in amber. When he had first decided that the thing to do was to be a newsman, he had also clearly seen an essential indecency in freezing a smile forever or preventing the effacement of a tear. He had been a long time getting over that feeling enough to be good at his work. Gradually he had come to understand that they trusted him enough not to mind his borrowing little bits of their souls. From this, he got a wordless feeling that somehow prevented him from botching them up.

So for Michaelmas his excursion from his apartment, through the building security systems, to the double-locked taxi dock, out through the night-bare streets and on board the rather small transatlantic aircraft with its short passenger list, was a plunge into refreshment. Although he recognized his shortcomings and unrealized accomplishments every step of the way.

He settled into the lounge with a smile of well-being. His tapering fingers curled pleasurably around a Negroni soon after the plane had completed its initial bound into the thinner reaches of the sky. He gazed around him as if he expected something new and wonderful to pop into his ken at any moment. He behaved as if a cruising speed of 2500 miles per hour in a thin-skinned pressurized device were exactly what Man had always been yearning for.

Down among the tail seats were two men in New York tailored suits who had come running aboard at the last moment. One of them was flashing press credentials and a broad masculine smile at the stewardess guarding the tourist class barrier. Even at the length of the plane's cabin, Michaelmas could recognize both a press card-holder and the old dodge of paying cheap but riding high. Now the two men were coming toward him, sure enough. One of them was Melvin Watson, who had undoubtedly picked up one of the two offers Michaelmas had turned down. The other was a younger stranger. Each of them was carrying a standard comm unit painted royal blue and marked with a network decal.

His machine was turned toward the two men. Domino's voice said through the conductor in his mastoid: "The other one is Joseph Campion. New in the East. Good

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Chicago reputation. Top of the commentator staff on WKMM-TV; did a lot of his own legwork on local matter. Went freelance about a year ago. NBC's been carrying a lot of his matter daytime; some night exposure lately." Michaelmas was glad the rundown had been short; there seemed to be no way for him to avoid sinus resonance from bone conduction devices.

"I could of told you, Joe," Watson was saying to Campion as they reached Michaelmas. "If you want to catch Larry Michaelmas, you better look in First Class." His hand closed around Michaelmas's. "How are you, Larry?" he rumbled. "Europe on a shoestring? Going to visit a sick relative? Avoiding someone's angry boyfriend?" When he spoke longer lines, even though he grinned and winked, his voice acquired the portentous pauses and nasal overtones that were his professional legacy from Army Announcers' School. But combined with his seamed face, his rawhide tan, and his eyes so pale blue that their pupils seemed inches deeper than the whites, the technique was very effective with the audience. Michaelmas had seen him scrambling forward over ripped sandbags in a bloodied shirt, and liked him.

"Good evening, Horse," he said, laughing, tilting his head up to study Watson, whom he hadn't seen personally in some time, and who seemed flushed and a little weary.

"Damn near morning," Watson snorted. "Lousy racket. Meet Joe Campion."

Campion was very taut and handsome. There was an indefinable cohesiveness about him, as though he were one solid thing from the surface of his skin on through — for instance, mahogany or some other such close-grained substance which could be nicked but not easily splintered. From those depths, his black eyes looked out. Even the crisp, short, tightly curled reddish hair on his well-shaped skull looked as if it would take a very sharp blade to trim.

"Very pleased to meet you, sir," he said in a tone for use on governors as he shook Michaelmas's hand.

"Won't you please sit down?" Michaelmas said, not because Watson wasn't already halfway into the chair beside him but because Campion put him in mind of the *politesse* of policy meetings and board rooms. He decided that Campion must be very self-confident to have abandoned his safe and inevitably rapid progress up the network corporate ladder. And he remembered that Domino had been impressed by him.

"Thank you, sir," Campion was

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murmuring. Watson was settling into his seat as if trampling hay, and tilting his fist up to his mouth as he caught the eye of the First Class stewardess. "Well, Larry," Watson said. "Looks like we're going to be climbing the Alps together, right?"

"I guess so, Horse," Michaelmas smiled.

There was a pleasant chime simultaneously from Watson's and Campion's comm units. Watson grunted, pulled the earplug out of its takeup, and inserted it in place. On Michaelmas's other side, Campion did the same. The two of them listened intently, faces blank, mouths slightly open, as Michaelmas smiled from one to the other. After a moment, Watson held his unit up to his mouth and said: "Got it. Out," and let the earplug rewind. "AP bulletin," he explained to Michaelmas. "One of their people got a 'No Comment' out of UNAC about some of their people having flown to Limberg's place. Jesus, I wish that girl would get here with that damned cart; I'm tapering off my daughter's engagement party. Looks like there's something happening over there after all."

Michaelmas said: "I imagine so." A No Comment in these circumstances was tantamount to an admission — a UNAC public relations man's way of keeping in with his employers and with the media at the same time. But this was twice, now, in this brief conversation, that Horse Watson had hinted for reassurance.

"You buy this story?" Watson asked now, doing it again.

Michaelmas nodded. He understood that all Watson thought he was doing was passing the time. "I don't think Reuters blows very many," he said.

"Me too, I guess. You have time to pick up any crowd reaction?"

"Some. It's all hopeful." And now, trading back for the relay of the AP bulletin, Michaelmas said: "Did you pick up the Gately comment?" When Watson shook his head, Michaelmas smiled mischievously and held up his machine. He switched on a component that imitated the sound of spinning tape reels. "I—ah—collected it from CBS in my cab. It's public domain anyway. Here it is," he said as the pilot lights went through an off-on sequence and then held steady as he pressed the switch again.

Will Gately was United States Assistant Secretary of Defense for Astronautics, and a former astronaut. Always lobbying for his own emotions, he was the perfect man for a job the Administration was tacitly committed to mishandling. "The wave of public jubilation at this uncomfirmed report," his voice

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said, "may be premature. It may be dampened tomorrow by the cold light of disappointment. But tonight, at least, America goes to bed exhilarated. Tonight, America remembers its own."

Watson's belly shook. "And tomorrow Russia reminds the world about the denationalization clause in the UN astronautics treaty. Jesus, I believe Kerosene Willy may revive the Space Race yet."

Campion said, startlingly after his silence, "The good doctor sure knows how to use his prime time." Michaelmas cocked his head toward him. Campion was right. But he was also loading his voice with knowledgeabilities that sat awkward on a man who'd never met Limberg. "Three-thirty AM local time on June 15 when he got that Reuters man out of bed," Campion was documenting his point. "Hit the good old USA right in the breadbasket," meaning the 10 PM news on June 14.

"What I'm thinking," Watson said right on top of Campion's final consonant, "is we're going to hit Berne about seven-thirty AM local. Limberg's still up in that sanatorium with the UNAC people and Norwood, and the conversation's flying. Then you figure that old man will go without his beauty sleep? I don't. It's going to be maybe Noon local before we stand any chance of talking to that crafty son of a bitch, and that's six hours past my bedtime. Meanwhile, all the media in Europe are right now beating the bushes there for color, background, and maybe even the crash site. Which means that the minute we touch ground, we've got to scurry our feet like crazy just to find out how far behind we are."

"Don't their European people have some staff on the ground there now?" Michaelmas asked gently, nodding toward the network decal on Watson's comm unit while Campion sat up a little, smiling.

"Oh, sure," Watson pressed on, "but you know how stringers are. They'll be tryin' to sell me postcard views of the mountains with X's inked on 'em where the capsule may have come down except it's got three months' snow on it. And meanwhile, Norwood stays under wraps, and *he* sleeps, or else they switch us a fast one and slide him out of there. What do you bet we get a leak he's been moved to Afrique when all the time they've got him in New York, God forbid Houston, or maybe even Tyura Tam. You'd enjoy the Aral climate in the summer, Joe. You'd like the commissars, too — they eat nice fresh press credentials for breakfast over there, Sonny."

Michaelmas blinked unhappily at Watson, who was concentrating now on the approaching liquor caddy and fishing in his breast

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pocket for money. He felt terribly sorry Watson felt obliged to hire Campion for an assistant when he was so afraid of him.

"Let me buy you fellows a drink," Watson was saying. Since he knew Michaelmas's drinks were on his ticket, and he despised Campion, Horse Watson was trying to buy his way into the company of men. Michaelmas could feel himself beginning to blush. He breathed quickly in an attempt to fight it down.

"Gee, I'll have to take a rain check," Campion said, suddenly all ingenuous. "Going by your summation, Mel, we'd better catch forty winks." He turned off his comm unit, leaned back wih his arms folded across his chest, and closed his eyes, thus sticking Watson with the duty of staying awake to monitor.

"I'd be glad of another one of these, Miss," Michaelmas said to the stewardess, holding up his half-full glass. "You make them excellently."

Watson had a bourbon and water, taking off the top half with one gulping swallow and then nursing the rest in his clenched hand. He sat brooding at his stiffly out-thrust shoes. After a while, he said forcefully: "Been around a long time, Larry, the two of us."

Michaelmas nodded. He chuckled. "Every time something happens in South America, I think about the time you almost led the Junta charge across the plaza at Maracaibo."

Watson smiled crookedly. "Man, we were right on top of it that day, weren't we?"

He took a very small sip of his drink. Watson was not drunk, and he was not a drunk, but he didn't smoke or stick, and he had nothing to do with his hands. Nor could he really stop talking. Most of the plane passengers were people with early morning business — couriers with certificates or portable valuta; engineers; craftsmen with specialties too delicate to be confidently executed by telewaldo; good, honest, self-sufficient specialists comforted by salaries that justified personal travel at ungodly hours — and they lay wrapped in quilts of tranquil self-esteem, nodding limp-necked in their seats with their reading lights off. Watson looked down the dimness of the aisle.

"The way it is these days lately, I'd damn near have to send off to Albania for my Party card and move south. Foment my own wars. Remember how it was when we were just starting out — Asia, Africa, Russia, Mississippi? Holy smoke, you'd just get something half put away, and somebody'd start it up again somewhere else. What ever happened to big ideological militancy anyway? All

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we've got now is these tired agrarian reformer bandidos hiding in the Andes, screaming Peking's got soft on imperialismo and stealing chickens."

"Yes, the world is quite different from the way I found it in my young manhood," Michaelmas said. Looking at the bereft slump of Watson's mouth, he spoke the words with a certain sympathy. "Now most of the world's violence is individual and petty."

Watson snorted softly. "Like that thing in New York where that freak was killing his neighbors for their apartment space. Christ, that's good for two minutes one day. No, no, look — we're in a funny racket, all of a sudden. You figure you're gonna spend your life making things real for the little folks in the parlor. You figured when you showed 'em a gut-shot farmer drowning in a rice paddy, it was because it meant something to Waukegan. But you show 'em the same guy today, and it's about a jealous husband or some goddam little thing like he speaks the wrong dialect or that paddy used to belong to some other tribe, and you know it's not going to get any bigger than that. It's cowboys and Indians again; it doesn't mean a thing in Waukegan, except the guy's dying, and he's dying the way they do in the holo dramas, so he's as real as the next actor. They judge his goddamn *performance*, for Christ's sake, and if he's convincing, then maybe it was important. It makes you sick to think he's not interesting if he's quiet about it. Man, so little of it's real anymore; they've got no idea it can happen to them. They don't want an idea. You remember that quote Alvin Moscow got from the plane crash survivor? 'We would all be a little kinder to each other.' *That* is what you and I should be all about."

Michaelmas sat very still, sharing Watson's angle of blind vision down the aisle, and being careful not to do anything distracting. He had learned long ago never to stop anyone.

Watson was unstoppable. "Norwood's up there breathing and feeling in that megabuck beauty shop of Limberg's and suspecting there's a God who loves him. I know Norwood — hell, so do you. Nice kid, but ten years from now he'll be endorsing a brand of 'phone. The point is, right now he's on that mountaintop with all that glory ringing in him, but that doesn't make him real to his bosses and it doesn't make him real to the little folks in the parlor. What makes him real is Limberg says he's real and Limberg's got not one but two reality certificates. Christ on a crutch, I've got half a mind to kill Norwood all over again — on the air, Larry, live from beautiful

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Switzerland, ladies and gentlemen, phut splat in glorious hexacolor 3D, and let him be real all over every God damned dining table in the world. Ten years from now, he'd thank me for it."

Michaelmas sat quiet.

Watson swung his head up and grinned suddenly, to show he was kidding about any part that Michaelmas might object to. But he could not hold the expression very long. His eyes wandered, and he jerked his head toward Campion. "He really asleep?"

Michaelmas followed his glance. "I believe so. I don't think he'd relax his mouth like that if he weren't."

"You catch on." Watson looked nakedly into Michaelmas's face with the horrid invulnerability of the broken. "I don't have any legs left," he explained. "Not leg legs — inside legs. Sawed 'em off myself. So I took in a fast young runner. Hungry, but very hot and a lot of realism in his head. Watch out for him, Larry. He's the meanest person I've ever met in my life. Surely no men will be born after him. My gift to the big time. Any day now he's going to tell me I can go home to the '60s. Galatea's revenge. And I'll believe him."

Michaelmas couldn't be quite certain of how his own face looked. In his ear, Domino had been telling him: "As you can imagine, I'm getting all three sets of pulse and respiration data from your area, so there's considerable garbling. But my evaluation is that Campion hasn't surrendered consciousness for a moment."

Watson had been clenching at his stomach with one hand. Now he put his drink down and got up to go to the lavatory. Campion continued to half-lie in his seat, his expression slack and tender. Michaelmas sat, smiling a little, quizzically.

Domino said with asperity: "Watson's right about one thing. He can't hack it anymore. That was a classic maniacal farrago, and it boils down to his not being able to understand the world. It wasn't necessary to count the contradictions after the first one."

It was difficult for Michaelmas to subvocalize well enough to activate his throat microphone without also making audible grunting sounds. He had never liked straining his body, and the equipment was implanted in him only because he needed it in his vocation at times. He kept the times as infrequent as he could, but he was not going to let Domino have the last word on that topic.

Men like Horse Watson were being cut down quickly. It was one of the nervous staples of recent shop gossip, and that, too, was having its effect on the scarier old heads. They came apart like

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spring-wound clocks when the tough young graduates with their 1965 birth certificates popped out of college with a major in Communications and a pair of minors in Psychology and Politics, and a 30,000 New Dollar tuition loan note at the bank.

He said to Domino: "He knows he doesn't make perfect sense. What does? He thinks of me as being of his own kind, and he's apologizing for slipping away and leaving our number the less. If you can see that, you can see that if you're kind to him, you're being kind to yourself. Now please be still for a while." He massaged the bridge of his nose. He did not look at Campion. He was having a split-second fear that if he did, the man might wink at him.

IV

It was truer than ever that airports look the same all over the world. But not all airports are located in the Alps.

Michaelmas descended just behind Watson and Campion, into a batting of light reflected from every surface, into a cup of nose-searing cool washed brilliance whose horizon was white mountaintops higher than the clouds. The field was located high enough above the Aar, and far enough from the city itself, to touch him with the sight of the Old City on its neck of land in the acute bend of the river, looking as unreally arranged as a literal painting. It was with that thought, blinking, that he managed to locate himself in time, space and beauty, and so consider that his soul had caught up with him.

There was a considerable commotion going on at the shuttle lounge debarking ramp. Movement out of the lounge had stopped. Watson had been right about any number of details; it was likely that half the journalists in Europe were on the scene, and there was a gesticulating, elbowing crowd of them there, many of them in berets and trenchcoats, displaying the freelance spirit.

Michaelmas made his way through them, working his way toward Customs and the cab rank, smiling, making brief reasonable comments about his own lack of information. As he cleared the fringes of the crowd, Domino said: "You have a suite at the Excelsior and an eight AM appointment with your crew director. That is forty-eight minutes from...now." Michaelmas reset his watch.

It was a beautiful drive into the city, with the road winding its way down above the river, looping lower and lower like a fly-fisherman's line until unexpectedly the cab crossed the stonework bridge and they were in the narrow streets of the Old City.

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"The escape capsule wreckage has not been reported as yet," Domino said. "There have only been a few daylight hours for the helicopters to be out. In any case, we can expect it to be under a considerable accumulation of snow, and not indicative of anything of value o us. If Limberg can produce genuine Norwood, he can produce genuine wreckage."

"Quite so," Michaelmas said. "I don't expect it to tell us anything. But it would be nice if I were the first newsman to report it."

"I am on all local communications channels," Domino said tartly, "and am also making the requisite computations. I have been since before arranging your hotel reservations."

"Didn't mean to question your professional competence," Michaelmas said. He chuckled aloud, and the cab driver said:

"*Ja, Mein Herr,* it is a day to feel young again." He winked into the rearview mirror. It was a moment before Michaelmas realized they had been driving by an academy for young ladies in blue jumpers and white blouses, and in their later teens. Michaelmas obligingly turned in his seat and peered back through the rear window at sun-browned legs scampering two by two up the old white steps to class. But to be young again would have been a very high price.

The suite in the Excelsior spoke of matured grace and cultivated taste. Michaelmas looked around approvingly as the captain supervised the bustling of the boys with his luggage and the plod of the gray old chambermaid with his towels. When they were all done, and he was sated with wandering from room to room through open doorways, he found the most comfortable drawing room chair and sank into it. Putting his feet on an ottoman, he called downstairs for coffee and pastry. He had about fifteen minutes before his crew director was due. He said to Domino: "All right, I suppose there are certain things we have to take care of before we get back to the main schedule."

"Yes," Domino said unflinchingly.

"All right, let's get to it."

"President Fefre."

Michaelmas grinned. "What's he done now?" Fefre was chief of state in one of the smaller African nations. He was a Harvard graduate in economics, had a knife scar running from his right temple to the left side of his jaw, and had turned Moslem for the purpose of maintaining a number of wives in the capital palace. He sold radium, refined in a Chinese-built plant, to anyone who would pay for it,

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running it out to the airport in little British trucks over roads built with American money. He had cut taxes back to zero, closed all but one newspaper, and last month had imprisoned the 72-year-old head of his air force as a revolutionary.

Domino said: "The Victorious Soviet People's Engineering Team has won the contract to design and build the hydroelectric dam at the foot of Lake Egendi, despite being markedly underbid by General Dynamics. A hundred thousand rubles in gold has been deposited to Fefre's pseudonymous account in the Uruguayan Peasant Union Bank. It would be no problem to arrange a clerical error that would bring all this to light."

Michaelmas chuckled. "No, no, let him go. The bank needs the working capital, and, besides, I like his style. Anything else?"

"The source of funds for the Turkish Greatness Party is the United Arab Republic."

"Imagine that. You sure?"

"Quite. The Turkish National Bank has recently gone into fully computerized operation, with connections of course to London, Paris, Rome, Cairo, New Delhi, and so forth. The Continental Bank and Trust Company of Chicago is in correspondence with all those, as part of the international major monetary exchange body, and is also the major and almost sole stockholder in the State Bank and Trust Company of Wilmette, Illinois, where I have one of my earliest links. When Turkey joined that network I immediately began a normal series of new data integrations. I now have all the resulting correlations, and that's one of them."

"Do you mean to say the Arabs are paying the Turks by check?"

"I mean to say there's a limit to the number of gold pieces one can stuff into a mattress. Sooner or later, someone has to put it somewhere safe, and when he does, of course, I find it."

"Yes, yes," Michaelmas said.

"I know you can take a joke," he said to Domino. "But sometimes I do wish you could understand a jest."

"Life," said Domino, "is too short."

"Yours?"

"No."

"Hmm." Michaelmas pondered for a moment. "Well, I don't think we need any expansionist revolutions in Turkey. The idea of armored cavalry charging the gates of Vienna again is liable to be too charming to too many people. Break that up, next opportunity." Michaelmas looked at his watch. "All right. Any more?"

"US Always has learned that Senator Stever is getting twenty-five thousand dollars a year from that

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northwestern lumber combine. USA's Washington office made a phone call reporting it to Hanrassy's national headquarters at Cape Girardeau."

"In that simpleminded code of theirs? If they're planning to save the whole country from the rest of the world, you'd think they'd learn to respect cryptoanalysis. Any information on what they're planning to do with this leverage?"

"Nothing definite. But that brings to six the total of senior senators definitely in their pockets, plus their ideological adherents. This is not a good time for USA to be gaining in power. Furthermore, although it's very early in the morning in Missouri, Hanrassy's known to work through the night quite often. I won't be surprised if a Senatorial inquiry starts today on why Colonel Norwood wasn't reinstated as head of the Outer Planets flight. Even allowing for her intake of Dexedrine, Hanrassy's annoyingly energetic."

"Better she than someone with staying power. But I think we'd better take this committee chairman pawn away from her. Sam Lemoyne's still on the night side for the *Times-Mirror*. It'd be good if he got the idea to go buy a drink for that beachboy Stever beat up in his apartment last year."

"I'll drop him a note," Domino said.

It was nearly eight o'clock. "All right, unless there's a real emergency, go ahead and follow standard practice with anything else that's pending." With the passage of time, Domino was beginning to learn more and more about how Michaelmas's mind worked. He didn't like it, but he could follow it when instructed. That fact was the only thing that let Michaelmas contemplate the passage of time with less than panic.

Michaelmas's house phone chimed. He listened and said: "Send her up." His crew director was here.

She came in just ahead of the room service waiter. Michaelmas attended to the amenities and they sat together on the balcony, sipping and talking. She and the crew were all on staff with his employer network. Her name was Clementine Gervaise, and he had never met her because the bulk of her previous experience had been with national media, and because this was his first time with her network, which was up-and-coming and hadn't been able to afford him before.

Gervaise — Madame Gervaise, he gathered from the plain band on her finger — was the model of one kind of fortyish, chic European woman. She was tall, blonde, with her hair pulled back severely from her brow but feathered out coquettishly over one ear, dressed

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in a plain blue-green couturier suit, and very professional. It took them ten minutes to work out what kind of equipment they had available, what sort of handling and transport capabilities they had for it, and what to do with it pending permission to enter the sanatorium grounds. They briefly considered the merit of intercutting old UNAC footage with whatever commentary he devised, and scrubbed that in favor of a nice, uncluttered series of grab shots of the sanatorium and any lab interiors they might be able to pick up. She expressed an interest in Domino's machine, which Michaelmas displayed to her as his privately designed comm unit, giving her the line of Proud Papa patter that had long ago somnolized all the newsmen he knew.

With all that out of the way, they still had a few sips of coffee left and a few bites of croissant to take, so they began to talk inconsequentially.

The skin on the backs of her hands was beginning to lose its youthful elasticity, so she did not do much gesturing, but she did have a habit of reaching up to pull down the dark glasses which were *de rigeur* in her mode. This usually happened at the end of a question such as: "It is very agreeable here at this time of year, is it not?" and was accompanied by a glance of her medium green eyes before the glasses went back into place and hid them again. She sipped at her cup daintily, her pursed lips barely kissing the rim. She kept her legs bent sideward together, and her unfortunately large feet pulled back inconspiciously against her chair.

All in all, Michaelmas was at first quite ready to classify her as being rather what you'd expect — a well-trained, competent individual in a high-paying profession which underwrote whatever little whims and personal indulgences she might have. This kind of woman was usually very good to work with, and he expected to be out of Switzerland before she had quite made up her mind whether she or the famous Laurent Michaelmas was going to do the seducing.

And in fact, Clementine Gervaise herself was so casual, despite the glances and the exposition from knees to ankles, that it seemed the whole business was only a pro forma gesture to days perhaps gone by for both of them. But just before he poured the last of the coffee from the chased silver pot into the translucent cup with its decoration of delicately painted violets, he found himself listening with more than casual attention to the intonations of her voice, and finding that his eyes rested on the highlights in her washed blonde

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coiffure each time she turned her head.

For content, her conversation was still no more than politeness required, and his responses were the same. But there was a certain comfortable relaxation within him which he discovered only with a little spasm of alertness. For the past minute or two, his smile of response to her various gambits about European travel and climate had been warming, and he had been thinking how pleasant it all was, sitting here and looking out over the mountains, sipping coffee in this air; how very pleasant it was to be himself. And he found himself remembering out of the aspect of his mind that was like an antique desk, some of its drawers bolted, and all the others a little warped and stiff in their slides, so that they opened with difficulty:

You come upon me like the morning air

Rising in summer on the dayward hills.

And so unlock the crystal freshets waiting, still,

Since last they ran in joy among the grasses.

He looked down into his cup, smiled and said: "Dregs," to cover the slight frown he might have shown.

"I'm sorry," she said as if she worked in the Excelsior kitchen. It was this domestic note that did it.

He continued to be charming, and in fact disarmingly attentive for the next few minutes until she left saying "I shall be looking forward to seeing you later today." And then when he had closed the door to the suite behind her, he walked back out onto the balcony and stood with his hands behind his back, his cheeks puffing in and out a little.

"What is it about her?" he said to Domino.

"There's a remarkable coincidence. She's very much as I'd expect your wife would have been by now."

"Really? Is that it?"

"I would say so. I have."

"Like Clementine Gervaise?" He turned back inside the parlor, his hands still clapsed behind him. He placed his feet undecidedly. "Well. What do you think this is?"

"On the data, it's a coincidence."

Michaelmas cocked his head toward the machine. "Are you beginning to learn to think beyond actuarials?" he said with pleasure.

"It may be a benefit of our relationship, father."

"Long time coming," Michaelmas said gruffly. He straightened and began to stride about the parlor. "But what have we here? Has someone been applying a great deal of deductive thought to what profession a man in my role would

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choose in these times? My goodness, Dr. Limberg, is all this part of a better mousetrap? Domino, it seems I might also have to watch behind me as I beat a path to his door."

Michaelmas kicked off his shoes as he stepped into the bedroom. "Well, I'm going to take an hour's nap."

He slept restlessly for thirty-seven minutes. From time to time he rolled over, frowning.

V

Domino woke him from a dream. "Mr. Michaelmas." He opened his eyes immediately.

"What? Oh, I'm afraid to go home in the dark," he said.

"Wake up, Mr. Michaelmas. It's nine twenty-three, local."

"What's the situation?" Michaelmas asked, sitting up.

"Multiple. A few moments ago, I completed my analysis of where the capsule crash site must be. I based my thinking on the requirements of the premise — a low trajectory to account for the capsule's escaping radar notice following the shuttle explosion; the need to have the crash occur within reasonable distance of Limberg's sanatorium, yet in a place where other people in the area would not be likely to notice or find it; and so forth. These conditions of course would fit either the truth or your hypothesis that Limberg is a resourceful liar.

"At any rate, I called the network, as you, and asked for a helicopter to investigate the site. I learned that they were already following Melvin Watson, who had recently taken off. Checking back on his activities, I find that just before catching the plane in New York last night he placed a call to a Swiss Army artillery major here. That officer is also on the mailing lists of a number of amateur rocket societies. On arrival here, Mr. Watson called the Major again several times. Following the last call, which was rather lengthy, Mr. Watson immediately boarded one of his client's helicopters and departed, leaving Campion to watch the sanatorium."

"Ah," Michaelmas chuckled. "If Horse had only been modern enough to call the university center here and get his data from their computer. You would have been on to him in a flash." Michaelmas patted the cold black top of the machine sitting on the nightstand. "You've been out-newsmanned, my friend. What do you want to bet Horse is headed straight as a die for the same place you've got marked with an X on your map?"

"Not a farthing. Precisely my point," Domino said. "There is more to the situation."

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"Go on."

"Following an exchange of phone calls with the sanatorium, UNAC Afrique has authorized a press conference for Norwood at any time no later than 1:00 PM local. One of the men they sent in here last night was Getulio Frontiere."

"Check." Frontiere was a smooth, capable press secretary. The conference would go very cleanly and pretty much the way UNAC wanted it. "No later than one o'clock. Then they want to say their say in time for the breakfast news on the east coast of the United States. Do you think they smell trouble with more heads like Gately?" He got to his feet and began to undress.

"I think it's possible. They're very quick to sense changes in the wind."

"Yes. Horse said that last night. Very sensitive to the popular dynamic." Stripped, Michaelmas picked up the machine, carried it into the bathroom, and set it down near the washbowl as he began to splash water, scrubbing his neck and ears.

"There's more," Domino said. "By happenstance, Tim Brodzik last week rescued the California governor's teenage daughter from drowning. He was invited to Sunday dinner at the governor's house, and extensively photographed with the grateful parents. He and the girl had their arms around each other."

Michaelmas stopped with his straight razor poised beside one soap-filmed cheek. "Who's that?"

"The beachboy Stever was involved with."

"Oh." He took a deep breath. Last year, he and Domino had invested much time in getting the governor elected. "Well — you might as well see if you can intercept that note to Sam Lemoyne. It would only confuse things now."

"Done. Finally, a registered air mail packet has cleared the New York General Post Office, routed through St. Louis. Its final destination is Cape Girardeau, Missouri. It was mailed from Berne, clearing the airport post office here yesterday afternoon."

"Yesterday afternoon? Addressed to Hanrassy?"

"Addressed to 'Public Information Officer, US Always.' "

"Damn," said Michaelmas, feeling his jaw. His face had dried, and he had to wet it and soap it again. "Who from?"

"Cikoumas et Cie. They are a local importer of dates, figs, and general sweetmeats."

"Figs," Michaelmas said, passing his right forearm over his head and pulling his left cheek taut with his fingertips as he laid the razor

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against his skin. "Sweetmeats." He watched the action of the razor on his face. Shaving this way was one of those eccentric habits you pick up when away from sources of power and hot water.

He was remembering days when he had been a graduate engineering student helping out the family budget with an occasional filler for a newspaper science syndicate. His wife had worked as a temporary salesclerk during December and sent him a chrome-headed, white plastic lawnmower of a thing that would shave your face whether you plugged it into the wall or the cigarette lighter of your car, if you had a car. He remembered very clearly the way his wife had walked and talked, the schooled attentive mannerisms intelligently blended from their first disjointed beginnings at drama classes. She had always played older than her age. She was too tall and too gaunt for an ingenue, and had had trouble getting parts. She had not been grown inside yet, but she had been very fine and he had been waiting warmly for her maturity. By the time the Department of Speech would have graduated her from Northwestern, she would have been fully coordinated. But in 1968 she'd had her head broken in front of the Conrad Hilton, and then for a while she'd vegetated, and then after a while she'd died.

He rinsed the glittering straight razor under the tap, and rinsed and dried his face. He dried the razor meticulously and put it back into its scarred Afghanistani leather-and-brass case. "Figs," he said. "Figs and queened pawns, savants and astronauts, world enough, but how much time? Where does it go? What does it do?" He scrubbed his armpits with the washcloth. "Boom-pa-boompa, boompa-boompa, boompa-boom pa-pa-pa-peen, herring boxes without topses...."

"I don't like it. I don't like it," he said to Domino as he put the fresh Room Service carnation in his buttonhole. "These people must mean something by this maneuver with the package. What's the idea? Or are you claiming Cikoumas is a coincidence?"

"No. There's a definite connection."

"Well, all right, then. But why do they send it via that route? Maybe they want something else."

"I don't understand your implication. They simply don't want postal employees noting Limberg's return address on a package to US Always. Something like that would be worth a few dollars to a media tipster. The Cikoumas front is an easy way around that."

"Ah, maybe. Maybe that's all. Maybe not." Michaelmas began

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striding back and forth. "We've spotted it. Maybe we're meant to spot it. Maybe they're laying a trail that only a singular kind of animal could follow. But must follow. Must follow, so can be detected, can be identified, phut, *splat!*"

"Excuse me, Mr. Michaelmas, but UNAC and Dr. Limberg have just announced a press conference at the sanatorium in half an hour. That'll be ten-thirty. I've called Madame Gervaise to assemble your crew, and there's a car waiting."

"All right." Michaelmas slung the terminal over his shoulder. "What if Cikoumas out in plain sight is intended to distract me from the character of the woman?"

"Oh?"

"Suppose they already know who I am. Then they must assume I've deduced everything. They must assume I'm fully prepared to act against them." Michaelmas softly closed the white-and-gilt door of the suite and strolled easily down the corridor with its tastefully striped wallpaper, its flowering carpet, and its scent of lilac sachet. He was smiling in his usual likeable manner. "So they set her on me. What else would account for her?" They stopped at the elevator and Michaelmas worked the bellpush.

"Perhaps simply a desire to keep tab on a famous investigative reporter who might sniff out something wrong with their desired story. Perhaps nothing in particular. Perhaps she's just a country girl, after all. Why not?"

"Are you telling me my thesis won't hold water?"

"A bathtub will hold water. A canteen normally suffices."

The elevator arrived. Michaelmas smiled warmly at the operator, took a stand in a corner, and brushed fussily at the lapels of his coat as the car dropped toward the lobby.

"What am I to do?" Michaelmas said in his throat. "What is she?"

"I have a report from our helicopter," Domino said abruptly. "They are two kilometers behind Watson's craft. They are approaching the mountainside above Limberg's sanatorium. Watson's unit is losing altitude very quickly. They have an engine failure."

"What kind of terrain is that?" Michaelmas said.

The elevator operator's head turned. *"Bitte sehr?"*

Michaelmas shook his head, blushing.

Domino said: "Very rough, with considerable wind gusting. Watson is being blown toward the cliff face. His craft is sideslipping. It may clear. No, one of the vanes has made contact with a spur. The fuselage is swinging. The cabin has struck. The tail rotor has separated from the empennage. The cabin is

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rebounding. The main rotor has sheared. There's a heavy impact at the base of the cliff. There is an explosion."

The elevator bounced delicately to the stop. The doors chucked open. "The main lobby, *Herr Mikelmaas.*"

Michaelmas said: "Dear God." He stepped out into the lobby and looked around blankly.

VI

Clementine Gervaise came up briskly. She had changed into a tweed suit and a thin soft blouse with a scarf at the throat. "The crew is driving the equipment to the sanatorium already," she said. "Your hired car is waiting for us outside." She cocked her head and looked closely at him. "Laurent, is something amiss?"

He fussed with his carnation. "No. We must hurry, Clementine." Her eau de cologne reminded him how good it was to breathe of one familiar person when the streets were full of strangers. Her garments whispered as she strode across the lobby carpeting beside him. The *majordomo* held the door. The chauffeured Citroen was at the foot of the steps. They were in, the door was pressed shut, the car pulled away from the curb, and they were driving through the city toward the mountain highway. The soft cushions put them close to one another. He sat looking straight ahead, showing little.

"We have to beat the best in the world this morning," he remarked. "People like Annelise Volkert, Hampton de Courcy, Melvin Watson...."

"She shows no special reaction," Domino said in his skull. "She's clean — on that count."

He closed his eyes for a moment. Then in his throat he said "That doesn't prove much" while she was saying:

"Yes, but I'm sure you will do it." She put her arm through his. "And I will make you see we are an excellent team."

Domino told him: "Papashvilly went out to the Afrique airfield, but back again a few minutes ago. Sakal phoned UNAC Afrique with a recall order."

"Forgive me, Clementine," Michaelmas said. "I must arrange my thoughts."

"Of course." She sat back, well-mannered, chic, attentive. Her arm departed from his with a little petting motion of her hand.

"Stand by for public," Domino said. He chimed aloud. "Bulletin. UPI Berne June 15. A helicopter crash near this city has claimed the life of famed newsman Melvin Watson. Dead with the internationally respected journalist is the

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pilot...." His speaker continued to relay the wireservice story. In Michaelmas's ear, he said: "She's reacting."

Michaelmas turned his head stiffly toward her. Clementine's mouth was pursed in dismay. Her eyes developed a sheen of grief. *"Oh, quelle domage!* Laurent, you must have known him, not so?"

His throat working convulsively, Michaelmas asked Domino for data on her.

"What you'd expect." The answer was a little slow. "Pulse up, respiration up. It's a little difficult to be precise. You're rather isolated up there right now and I'm having to do a lot of switching to follow your terminal. I'm also getting some echo from all that rock around you; it's metallic."

Michaelmas glanced out the window. They were on the highway, skimming closely by a drill-marked and blasted mountain shoulder on one side and an increasingly disquieting drop-off on the other. The city lay below, popping in and out of view as the car followed the serpentine road. Somewhere down there was the better part of Domino's actual present location, generally except for whatever might be flitting overhead in some chance satellite.

The spoken bulletin came to an end. It had not been very long. Clementine sat forward, her expression anxious. "Laurent?"

"I knew him," Michaelmas said gently. "I regret you never met him. I have lost a friend." And I am alone now, among the Campions. "I have lost a friend," he said again, to apologize to Horse for having patronized him.

She touched his knee. "I am sorry you are so hurt."

He found himself unable to resist putting his hand over hers for a moment. It was a gesture unused for many years between them, he began to think, and then caught himself. "Thank you, Madame Gervaise," he said, and each of them withdrew a little, sitting silently in the back of the car.

At their destination, there was a jammed asphalt parking lot beside a gently sloping meadow in which helicopters were standing and in which excess vehicles had roweled the sod. The Citroen found a place among the other cars and the broadcast trucks. Up the slope was the sanatorium, very much constructed of bright metal and of polarizable windows, the whole of the design taking a sharply-pitched snow-shedding silhouette. Sunlight stormed back from its glitter as if it were a wedge pried into heaven.

They got out and Clementine Gervaise looked around. "It can be very peaceful here," she remarked before waving toward their crew

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truck. People in white coveralls and smocks with her organization's pocket patch came hurrying. She merged with them, pointing, gesturing, tilting her head to listen, shaking her head, nodding, tapping her forefinger on a proffered clipboard sheet. In another moment, some of them were eddying back toward the equipment freighter and others were trotting up the sanatorium steps, passing and encountering other crews in similar but different jumpsuits. From somewhere up there, a cry of rage and deprivation was followed by a 55mm lens bouncing slowly down the steps.

"10:20, local," Domino said.

"Thank you," Michaelmas replied, watching Clementine. "How are your links now?"

"Excellent. What would you expect, with all this gear up here and with elevated horizon-lines?"

"Yes, of course," Michaelmas said absently. "Have you checked the maintenance records on Horse's machine?"

"Teach your grandmother to suck eggs. If you're asking was it an accident, my answer is it shouldn't have happened. But I'm currently running back through all parts suppliers and subassembly manufacturers, looking for things like high reject rates at final inspection stages. It'll be a while. And other stones are waiting to be turned."

Clementine Gervaise had entered the awareness of the comm unit's sensors. "Here comes one."

"Let's concentrate on this Norwood thing for now," Michaelmas said.

"Of course, Laurent," Clementine said softly. "The crew is briefed and the equipment is manned."

Michaelmas's mouth twitched. "Yes...yes, of course they are. I was watching you."

"You like my style? Come — let us go in." She put her arm through his and they went up the steps.

There was a credential vertification just beyond the smoked-glass front doors. A junior UNAC aide was checking names against a list. It was a scene of polite crowding as bodies filled in behind Michaelmas and Clementine.

The aide smiled. He checked off their names on his list, got a photocopied floor diagram from his table, and made a mark on it for Clementine. "We've given your crew a spot right here in the first row of the balcony," he said. "You just go up those stairs over there at the back of the foyer and you'll find them. And, Mr. Michaelmas, we've put you front row center in the main auditorium."

"Thank you." Michaelmas changed the shape of his lips. He did not appear to alter the tone or

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level of his voice, but no one standing behind him could hear him. "Is Mr. Frontiere here?"

The aide raised his eyebrow. "Yes, sir. He'll be up on the podium for the Q and A."

"I wonder if I could see him for just a moment now."

The aide grimaced and glanced at his wristwatch. Michaelmas's smile was one of complete sympathy. "Sorry to have to ask," he said.

The aide smiled back helplessly. "Well," he said while Michaelmas's head cocked insouciantly to block anyone's view of the young man's lips. "I guess we do owe you a couple, don't we? Sharp left down that side hall. The next to the last door leads into the auditorium near your seat. The last door goes backstage. He's there."

"Thank you." There was pressure at Michaelmas's back. He knew without looking that a score of people were filling the space back to the doors, and others were beginning to elbow each other subconsciously at the head of the outside steps.

"I will manage it for you, Laurent," Clementine said quietly.

"Ah? *Merci. A bientot,*" Michaelmas said. He stepped around the reception table and wondered what the hell.

Clementine moved with him, and then a little farther forward, her stride suddenly long and masculine. She pivoted toward the balcony stairs and the heel snapped cleanly off one shoe. She lurched, caught her balance by slapping one hand flat against the wall, and cried out *"Merde!"* hoarsely. She plucked off the shoe, threw it clattering far down the long foyer, and kicked its mate off after it. She padded briskly up the stairs in her stockinged feet, still followed by every eye.

Michaelmas, grinning crookedly, moved down the side hall, his progress swift, his manner jaunty, his footsteps soundless. He pushed quickly through the door at the end.

Heads turned sharply — Limberg, Norwood, a handful of UNAC administrative brass, Frontiere, their torsos supported by stiff arms as they huddled over a table spread with papers and glossy photographic enlargements. Limberg's lump-knuckled white forefinger tapped at one of the glossies.

Michaelmas waved agreeably as they regarded him with dismay. Frontiere hurried over.

"Laurent—"

" *'Giorno,* Tulio. Quickly — before I go in — is UNAC going to reshuffle the flight crew?"

Frontiere's angular, patrician face suddenly declared it would say nothing. "Why do you ask this, Laurent?"

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Who would have thought a man would have so much credit deducted for such a simple answer? Merely an answer that would let the world's most prominent newsman frame his press conference comments more securely. "Norwood was in command, Papashvilly was put in command, Papashvilly is a major. Answer my question and you tell me much. I think it a natural query...*veglio amico.*"

Frontiere grimaced uncomfortably. "Perhaps it is. We are all very much into our emotions this morning, you understand? I was not giving you sufficient credit for sapience, I believe."

Michaelmas grinned. "Then answer the God damned question."

Frontiere moved his eyes as if wishing to see the people behind him. "If necessary, an announcement will be made that it is not planned to change the flight crew."

Michaelmas cocked his head. "In other words, this is an excellent fish dinner especially if someone complains of stomach. Is that the line you propose to defend?"

Frontiere's sour grin betrayed one of his famous dimples. "I am not doing well with you this morning...old friend," he said softly. "Perhaps you would like to speak quietly with me alone after the conference."

"Between friends?"

"Entirely between friends."

"*Bene.*"

"Thank you very much." Frontiere smiled slightly. "Now I must get back to my charges. Take your place in the auditorium, Laurent; the dogs and ponies are all cued. Despite one or two small matters, we shall begin shortly." Frontiere turned and walked back toward the others, spreading his arms, palms up, in a very Latin gesture. They resumed their intent whispering. Limberg shook his hand repeatedly over the one particular photograph. The side of his fingertip knock knock knocked on the tabletop.

Michaelmas stepped out and softly closed the door. Three more steps and he was in at the side of the auditorium.

It was a medical lecture hall during the normal day, and a place where the patients could come to watch entertainment in the evening. Nevertheless, it made a very nice 200-seat facility for a press conference, and the steep balcony was ideal for cameras, with the necessary power outlets and sound system outputs placed appropriately. To either side of the moderately thrust stage, lenticular reflectors were set at a variety of angles, so that an over-the-shoulder shot could be shifted into a tele closeup of anyone in the main floor audience.

Michaelmas stopped at Joe

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Campion. He held out his hand. "I'd like to express my sympathies. And wish you good luck at this opportunity." It seemed a sentiment the man would respond to.

The eyes moved. "Yeah. Thanks."

"Are you planning an obituary feature?"

"Can't now." They were looking over his shoulder at the curtain. "Got to stay with the main story. That's what he'd want."

"Of course."He moved on. The pale tan fabric panels of the acoustic draperies made an attractive wall decor. They gave back almost none of the sound of feet shuffling, seats tilting, and cleared throats.

Michaelmas slipped toward his seat, nodding and waving to acquaintances. He found his name badge pinned to the fabric, looked at it, and put it in his pocket. He glanced up at the balcony; Clementine put her finger to her ear, cocked her thumb, and dropped it. He pulled the wireless earplug out of its recess in Domino's terminal and inserted it. A staff announcer on Clementine's network was doing a lead-in built on the man-in-the-street clips Domino had edited for them in Michaelmas's name, splicing in reaction shots of Michaelmas's face from stock. Then he apparently went to a voice-over of the whole-shot of the auditorium from a pool camera; he did a meticulous job of garnishing what the world was seeing as a room full of people staring at a closed curtain.

There was a faint pop and Clementine's voice on the crew channel replaced the feed to the network. "We're going to a tight three-quarter right of your head, Laurent," she said. "I like the light best that way, with a little tilt-up, please, of the chin. Coming up on mark."

He raised a hand to acknowledge and adopt an expression learned from observing youthful statesmen.

"Mark."

"Must cut," Domino's voice said suddenly. "Meet you Berne."

Michaelmas involuntarily stared down at the comm unit, then remembered where he was and restored his expression.

"—ere we go!" Clementine's voice was back in.

The curtains were opening. Getúlio Frontiere was standing there at a lighted podium. A table with three empty forward-facing chairs was sited behind him, under the proscenium arch.

Frontiere introduced himself and said:

"Ladies and Gentlemen, on behalf of the Astronautics Commission of the United Nations of the World, and as guests with you here

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of Doctor Nils Hannes Limberg, we bid you welcome." As always, the smile dawning on the Borgia face might have convinced anyone that everything was easily explained and had always been under control.

"I would now like to present to you Mr. Josip Sakal, Eastern Administrative Director for the UNAC. He will make a brief opening statement and will be followed to the podium by Dr. Limberg. Dr. Limberg will speak, again briefly, and then he will present to you Colonel Norwood. A question-and-answer period—"

A rising volume of wordless pandemonium took the play away from him, compounded of indrawn breaths, hands slapping down on chair arms, bodies shifting forward, shoes scraping.

Michaelmas's neighbor — a nattily dressed Oriental from New China Service — said: "That's it, then. UNAC has officially granted that it's all as announced."

Michaelmas nodded absently. He found himself with nothing more in his hands than a limited comm unit on Automatic, most of its bulk taken up by nearly infinite layers of meticulously microcrafted dead circuitry, and by odd little Rube Goldberg things that flickered lights and made noises to impress the impressionable.

Frontiere had waited out the commotion, leaning easily against the podium. Now he resumed: "—a question-and-answer period will follow Colonel Norwood's statement. I will moderate. And now, Mr. Sakal."

There was something about the way Sakal stepped forward. Michaelmas stayed still in his seat. Jo the Bird, as press parties and rosy-fingered poker games had revealed him over the years, would show his hole card anytime after you'd overpaid for it. But there was a relaxed Jo Sakal and there was a murderously angry Jo Sakal who looked and acted almost precisely like the former. This was the latter.

Michaelmas took a look around. The remainder of the press corps was simply sitting there waiting for the customary sort of opening remark to be poured over the world's head. But then perhaps they had never seen the Bird with a successfully drawn straight losing to a flush.

Michaelmas keyed the Transmit button of his comm unit once, to let Clementine know he was about to feed. Then he locked it down, faced into the nearest reflector, and smiled. "Ladies and gentlemen, good day," he said warmly. "Laurent Michaelmas here. The man who is about to speak" — this lily I am about to paint — "has a well-established reputation for quickness of mind, responsible decisions, and an

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unfailing devotion to UNAC's best interests." As well as a tendency to snap drink stirrers whenever he feels himself losing control of the betting.

With his peripheral vision, Michaelmas had been watching Sakal stand mute while most of the people in the room did essentially what Michaelmas was doing. When Sakal put his hands on the podium, Michaelmas said: "Here is Mr. Sakal." He unlocked.

"How do you do." Sakal looked straight out into the pool camera. He was a wiry man with huge cheekbones and thick black hair combed straight back from the peak of his scalp. There was skillfully applied matte makeup on his forehead. "On behalf of the Astronautics Commission of the United Nations of the World, I am here to express our admiration and delight." Michaelmas found it noteworthy that Sakal continued to address himself only to the world beyond the blandest camera.

"The miracle of Colonel Norwood's return is one for which we had very much given up hope. To have him with us again is also a personal joy to those of us who have long esteemed his friendship. Walter Norwood, as one might expect of any spacefaring individual, is a remarkable. person. We who are privileged to work for peaceful expansion of mankind in space are also privileged by many friendships with such individuals from many nations. To have one of them return whom we had thought lost is to find our hearts swelling with great emotion."

Sakal was looking earnestly into the camera, his hands gripping the sides of the podium. "The number of Man's space pioneers has not today been made one more. We have *all* been made greater; you and I as well as those whose training and experience are directed at actually piloting our craft in their journeys upon this mighty frontier."

Michaelmas kept still. It wasn't easy. For a moment, it had seemed that Sakal's private fondness for John F. Kennedy would lead him into speaking of 'this new ocean.' His natural cautions had diverted him away from that, but only into a near stumble over 'New Frontier,' an even more widely known Kennedyism. Sakal wasn't merely enraged; he was rattled, and that was something Michaelmas had never seen before.

"We look forward to working with Colonel Norwood again," Sakal said. "There are many projects on the schedule of the UNAC which require the rare qualities of someone like himself. Whatever his assignment, Colonel Norwood will perform faithfully in the best traditions of the UNAC

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and for the good of all mankind."

Well, he had gone by way of Robin Hood's barn, but he had finally gotten there. Now to point it out. Michaelmas keyed Transmit and locked. "Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "we have just heard the news that Colonel Norwood will indeed be returning to operational status with UNAC. His new duties cannot be made definite at this time, but Mr. Sakal is obviously anxious to underscore that it will be an assignment of considerable importance." As well as to let us all know that he is as concerned for his good buddy's wellbeing as anyone could be, and as well as to betray that UNAC is suddenly looking back a generation. Damn. Organizations nurtured specialists like Frontiere to dress policy in jackets of bulletproof phrasing, and then the policymakers succumbed to improvisation on camera because it made them feel more convincing to use their own words.

Speaking of words....

"A position of high responsibility is certainly in order for the Colonel if he is fully recovered," Michaelmas was saying. It was gratifying how automatically the mind and the tongue worked together, first one leading and then the other, the one never more than a millimicrosecond behind the other, whichever was appropriate to the situation. The face, too; the wise older friend, the worldly counsellor. The situation is always important, but neither inexplicable nor cause for gloom.

"The vast amount of physical catching-up to do — the months of training and rehearsal that have passed in Colonel Norwood's absence from UNAC's programs — would make it extremely difficult to rejoin any ongoing project." Smooth. As the sentence had flowed forward, he had considered and rejected saying "impossible." In fact it probably *was* barely possible; with a large crew, redundant functions, and modern guidance systems, spaceflight was far from the trapeze act it had been in Will Gately's day. And if I am going to make UNAC work, if I am going to make work all the things of which UNAC is only the currently prominent part, then the last thing I can do is be seen trying to make it work. So I can't really be any more direct than Sakal was being, can I? Smile inside, wise older friend. They call it irony. It is in fact the way of the world.

"It's possible Mr. Sakal is hinting at the directorship of the Outer Planet Applications program, which will convert into industrial processes the results of the engineering experiments to be brought back by the Outer Planets expedition." It's also possible Laurent Michaelmas is throwing

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UNAC a broad hint on how to kick Norwood upstairs. Perhaps in the hope that while they kick him, his arse will open to disclose gear trains. What then, Doctor Limberg? What now, Laurent Michaelmas? All he had beside him was a magic box full of nothing — a still, clever thing that did not even understand it was a tool, nor could appreciate how skillfully it was employed. "And now, back to Mr. Sakal."

All Sakal was doing was introducing Limberg, and waiting until the old man was well advanced from the wings before circling around the table and taking one of the three chairs. Everyone was so knowledgeable on playing for the media these days. They kept it short, they broke it to allow time for comment, they didn't upstage each other. Even when they were in a snit, they built these things like actors re-creating psychodramas from a transcript.

Of course, these people here on Limberg's stage were the survivors of the selection process. The ones who didn't begin learning it early were the ones you never heard of.

"Doctor Limberg naturally needs no introduction," Michaelmas said to a great many millions of people...few of them, it seemed, buried deep in the evening hours. Prime Time was advancing slothfully out in the Pacific wasteland. Why was that? "What he appears to deserve is the world's gratitude."

Unlock. The great man stands there like a graven saint. The kind, knowing eyes sweep both the live and the electronic audience. The podium light, which had cast the juts and hollows of Sakal's face into harsh no-nonsense relief, seemed now to be more diffuse, and perhaps a more flattering shade. Michaelmas sighed. Well, we all do it one way or another.

"Welcome to my house," Limberg said in German. Michaelmas thought about it for a moment, then put a translator output in his ear. He could speak and understand it, especially the western dialects, but there might be some nuance, either direct from Limberg or unconsciously created by the translator.

Limberg was smiling and twinkling, his hands out, the genial host. "My associates and I are deeply honored. I can report to you that we did not fail our responsibilities toward the miracle that conveyed Colonel Norwood in such distress to us." Now the visage was solemn, but the stance of his shoulders and slightly bowed head indicated quiet pride.

He's overweening, Michaelmas thought. The man radiates goodness and wisdom like a rich uncle in a nephew's eyes. And so it is with the world; those who claim

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mankind knows nothing of justice, restraint, modesty or altruism are all wrong. In every generation, we have several individuals singled out to represent them to us.

No man can be a hero to his media. The old man's ego and his gesturings were common stock in after-hours conversation. But they all played along, seeing it harmless when compared to his majesty of mind — assuming he had some. They let him be the man in the white coat, and he gave them stitches of newsworthy words to suture up fistulas of dead air, the recipient not only of two Nobel awards but of two crashes—

If Domino were here, Michaelmas thought, oppressed, he would have pulled me up for persiflage long before now.

What *is* it?.he thought. What in the world are they doing to me and mine? Who are they?

Limberg, meanwhile, was spieling out all the improbables of Norwood's crash so near the sanatorium, so far from the world's attention. If it weren't Limberg, and if they weren't all so certain Norwood was waiting alive and seamless in the wings, how many of them here in this room would have been willing to swallow it? But when he looked around him now, Michaelmas could see it going down whole, glutionously.

And maybe it's really that way? he thought, finally.

Ah, no, no, they are using the mails to defraud somehow. And most important I think they have killed Horse Watson, probably because he frightened them with how swiftly he could move.

When he thought of that, he felt more confident. If they were really monolithically masterly, they'd have had the wreckage all dressed and propped as required. More, they would have been icy sure of it, come Ninevah, come Iron Darius and all his chariots against them. But they hadn't liked Watson's directness. They'd panicked a little. Someone on the crew had said "Wait — no, let's take one more look at it before we put it on exhibit." And so they had knocked Watson down not only to forestall him but to distract the crowd while they made doubly sure.

It was good to think they could be nervous.

It was bad to think nevertheless how capable they were.

Now Limberg was into orthopedics, immunology, tissue cloning; it was all believable. It was years since they'd announced being able to grow a new heart from a snippet of a bad one; what was apparently new was being able to grow it in time to do the patient any good.

Keying in, Michaelmas said a few words about that to his audience, just as if he believed it.

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Meanwhile, he admired the way Limberg was teasing the time away, letting the press corps wind up tighter and tighter just as if they were ordinary rubes awaiting the star turn at the snake oil show, instead of the dukes and duchesses of world opinion.

"...but the details of these things," Limberg was finally concluding, "are of course best left for later consideration. I am privileged now to reintroduce to you the United States of North America astronaut Colonel Doctor of Engineering Walter Norwood."

And there he was, striding out of the wings, suddenly washed in light, grinning and raising one hand boyishly in a wave of greeting. Every lens in the room sucked him in, every heart beat louder in that mesmerized crowd, and the media punched him direct into the world's gut. But not on prime time. Of all the scheduling they could have set up, this was just about the worst. Not that there was any way to take much of the edge off this one. Nevertheless, when this news arrived at Mr. and Mrs. America's breakfast table, it would be hours cold; warmed-over, blurred by subsequent events of whatever kind. A bathing beauty might give birth and name a dolphin as the father. Professional terrorists, hired by Corsican investors in the Carlsbad radium spa, might bomb President Fefre's palace. General Motors might announce there would be no new models for the year 2001, since the world was coming to an end.

It suddenly occurred to Michaelmas that if he were UNAC, he'd have had Papashvilly here to shake Norwood's hand at this moment, and throw a comradely arm around his shoulders, and thus emphasize just who it was that was being welcomed home and who it was that had drawn the water and hewn the wood meanwhile.

But they had retreated from that opportunity. Norwood was standing alone at the podium. Limberg had drifted back to join Sakal at the table, Frontiere was blended into the walls somewhere until Q and A time, and the American colonel had the attention. He had it pretty well, too. Limberg's lighting electricians were doing a masterful job on him.

"I'm very glad to see you all," Norwood said softly into the cameras, his hair an aureole of backlighting. He raised his chin a little, and his facial lines were bathed out by a spot mounted out of sight somewhere in the podium box itself. "I want to thank Dr. Limberg and his staff." He was like an angel. Michaelmas's hackles were rising. "And now I'm ready to sit down and take questions." He smiled and stepped back.

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The lighting changed; now the podium was played down, and the table was illuminated. Sakal and Limberg were standing. Frontiere was coming out of the wings. Norwood reached his chair. The press corps leaned forward, some with hands rising and mouths opening to call attention to their questions, and as they leaned some lackey somewhere began to applaud. Caught on the lean, it was easy to stand. Standing, it was easy to applaud. Scores of palms resounded, and the walls quivered. Limberg as well as Norwood smiled and nodded modestly.

Michaelmas fidgeted. He closed his fists. Where was the UNAC physicist with his charts and pointer, his vocabulary full of coriolis effect and telemetry nulls, his animation holograms of how a radar horizon swallows a man-carrying capsule? If no one else was going to do it, Norwood should have.

It wasn't going to happen. In another moment, a hundred and a half people, each with an individual idea of what needed asking, were going to begin competing for short answers to breathless questions. The man whose media radiated its signal from an overhead satelite to a clientele of bangled cattlemen in wattle huts had concerns not shared by the correspondent for Dow Jones. The people from Science News Service hardly listened to whatever response was drawn by the representative of *Elle*. And there was only a circumscribed area of time to work in. The bathing beauty was out there somewhere, jostling Fefre and chiliasm for space on the channels, jockeying her anomalously presented hips.

It was all over. They were not here to obtain information after all. They were here to sanctify the occasion, and when they were done the world would think it knew the truth and was free.

Frontiere was at the podium. This sort of thing was his handiwork. He moved effortlessly, a man who had danced this sort of minuet once or twice before. UNAC's man, but doing the job Limberg wanted done.

And thus Sakal's impotent rage. Somehow the Bird was over the grand old man's barrel.

"The questions?" Frontiere was saying to the press corps.

My hat is off to you, you son of a bitch, Michaelmas was saying, and yes, indeed, we will talk afterward, friend to friend. I am senior in prestige here; it is incumbent on me to frame the first question. To set the tone, so to speak. I raise my hand. Getulio smiles toward me. "Yes, Mr. Michaelmas?"

"Colonel Norwood's presence here delights us all," I say. There

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are amenities that must of course be followed. I make the obligatory remark on behalf of the media. But I am the first voice from the floor. The world hears me. I have spoken. It's all true. He is risen. The people of the world rejoice.

But they are *my* people! God damn it, *my* people!

"My question is for Mr. Sakal. I'd like him to explain how Colonel Norwood's presence here jibes with UNAC's prior explanations of his death." I stand with a faint little twinkle visible in my eye. I am gently needling the bureaucrats. I am in fact doing no such thing. If Frontiere and Sakal have not already rehearsed this question a thousand times then they are *all* imposters. I am a clown. I toss the ball so they may catch it gracefully.

Sakal leans forward in his chair, his hands cupped on the table. "Well, obviously," he delivers, "there was some sort of failure in our tracking and monitoring systems." He causes himself to appear rueful. "Some embarrassing failure."

We all chuckle.

"I assume it's being gone into."

"Oh, yes." Something in the set of Sakal's jaw informs the audience that somewhere out there blades are thudding and heads are rolling.

I have asked my questions. I have set the tone. I have salvaged what I can from this wreck. My audience thinks I was not afraid to ask a delicate question, and delicate enough not to couch it in a disquieting manner.

I sit down. The next questioner is recognized. Frontiere is a genius at seeming to select on some rational basis of priority. In due time, he gets to Joe Campion. See Campion stand. "Colonel Norwood, what's your next destination? Will you be coming to the USA in the near future?"

"Well, that depends on my duty assignment."

"Would you accept a Presidential invitation?" He slips it in quickly. Sakal regards him quietly.

"If we had such an invitation," Sakal answers for Norwood. "We would of course arrange duty time off for Colonel Norwood in order that he might visit with the chief executive of his native land, yes."

Ah, news. And the hero could then doubtless be diverted for a few tickertape parades, etc. Campion has shrewdly uncovered the obvious inevitable. But it was a good question to have been seen asking.

Ah, you bastards, bastards, bastards. I sit in my place. In a decent while, I will ask another question of some kind. But if I were the man you think me, the questions I'd ask would have you in pieces. Phut, splat! Live in glorious hexacolor, direct from Switzerland, ladies and gentlemen, if I were not

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also only a clever simulacrum of what I ought to be.

VII

The sorry business wound itself down toward 11:30. For his audience, Michaelmas ran off a few closing comments in dignity. After everything was off the air, Frontiere announced a small press reception in the dining hall.

Michaelmas wore his smile. He took a Kirr and nibbled tender spiced rare lamb slivers on a coaster of trimmed pumpernickel. He found Norwood, Limberg and Frontiere all together, standing against a tapestry depicting medieval physicians in consultation at the bedside of a dying monarch. Up close, Norwood looked much more like he ought — fineline wrinkles in the taut skin, a grey hair for every two blond ones, a few broken capillaries in his cheeks. By now Michaelmas had downed the *hors d'oeuvre*. He held out his hand. "Good morning, Walt. You don't appear the least bit changed, I'm pleased to be able to say."

"Hello, Larry." Norwood grinned. "Yeah. Feels good."

Limberg had taken off his white duster and was revealed in a greenish old tweed suit that accordioned at the elbows and knees. A tasseled Bavarian pipe curved down from one curner of his mouth and rested in the cup of one palm. He sucked on it in measured intervals, and aromatic blue wisps of smoke escaped his flattened lips. Michaelmas smiled at him. "My congratulations, Doctor. The world may not contain sufficient honors."

Limberg's hound dog eyes turned upward toward Michaelmas's face. He said: "It is not honors that cause one to accomplish such things."

"No, of course not." Michaelmas turned to Frontiere. "Ah, Getulio. And where is Josip? I don't see him."

"Mr Sakal is a little indisposed and had to leave," Limberg said. "As his co-host for this reception, I express his regrets." Frontiere nodded.

"I am very sorry to hear that," Michaelmas said. "Getulio, I wonder if I might take you aside and speak with you for just a moment. Excuse me, Dr. Limberg, Walter. I must leave for my hotel almost immediately, and Mr. Frontiere and I have an old promise to keep."

"Certainly, Mr. Michaelmas. Thank you for coming." Suck suck. Wisp.

Michaelmas moved Frontiere aside with a gentle touch on the upper arm. "I am at the Excelsior," he said quietly. "I will be in Switzerland perhaps a few hours more, perhaps not. I hope you'll be able to find the time to meet me."

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He laughed and affectionately patted Frontiere's cheek. "I hope you can arrange it," he said in a normal tone. "*Arrivederci.*" He turned away with a wave and moved toward where he had seen Clementine chatting beside a spindling fortyish bald man with a professorial manner.

Clementine was wearing a pair of low canvas shoes, presumably borrowed from a crew member. She smiled as she saw Michaelmas looking at her feet. "Laurent," she said with a graceful inclination of her head. He took her hand, bowed, and kissed it.

"Thank you."

"*Merci. Pas de quoi.*" A little bit of laughter lingered between them in their eyes. She turned to the man beside her. His olive skin and sunken, lustrous brown eyes were not quite right for a pin-striped navy blue suit, but the vest and the gold watchchain were fully appropriate. There were pens in his outer breast pocket, and chemical stains on his very slightly palsied fingers. "I would like you to meet an old acquaintance," Clementine said. "Laurent, this is Medical Doctor Kirstiades Cikoumas, Dr. Limberg's chief associate. Kiki, this is Mr. Michaelmas."

"A pleasure, Mr. Michaelmas." The long fingers extended themselves limply. Cikoumas had a way of curling his lips inward as he spoke, so that he appeared to have no teeth at all. Michaelmas found himself looking up at the man's palate.

"An occasion for me," Michaelmas said. "Permit me to extend my admiration for what has been accomplished here."

"Ah." Cikoumas waved his hands as if dispersing smoke. "A bagatelle. Your compliment is natural, but we look forward to much greater things in the future."

"Oh."

"You are with the media? A colleague of Madame Gervaise?"

"We are working together on this story."

Clementine murmured: "Mr. Michaelmas is quite well known, Kiki."

"Ah, my apologies! I am familiar with Madame from her recent stay with us, but I know little of your professional world; I never watch entertainment."

"Then you have an enviable advantage over me, Doctor. Clementine, excuse me for interrupting your conversation, but I must get back to Berne. Is there an available car?"

"Of course, Laurent. We will go together. *Au revoir,* Kiki."

Cikoumas bowed over her hand like a trick bird clamped to the edge of a water tumbler. "*A revenance.*" Michaelmas wondered what would happen if he were to

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put his shoe squarely in the man's posterior.

On the ride back, he sat away from her in a corner, the comm unit across his lap. After a while she said:

"Laurent, I thought you were pleased with me."

He nodded. "I was. Yes. It was good working with you."

"But now you are disenchanted." Her eyes sparkled and she touched his arm. "Because of Kiki? I enjoy calling him that. He becomes so foolish when he has been in a cafe too long." Her eyes grew round as an owl's and her mouth became toothless. "Oh, he looks, so — *Comme un hibou, tu sais?* — like the night bird with the big eyes, and he speaks amazingly. I am made nervous, and I joke with him a little, and he says it does not matter what I call him. A name is nothing, he says. Nothing is unique. But he does not like it, entirely, when I call him Kiki and say I do not think anyone else ever called him *that* before." She touched Michaelmas's arm again. "I tease too much." She looked contrite, but her eyes were not totally solemn. "It is a forgivable trait, isn't it so, if we are friends again?"

"Yes, of course." He patted her hand. "In the main, I'm simply tired."

"Ah, then I shall let you rest," she said lightly. But she folded her arms and watched him closely as she settled back into her corner.

The way to do it, Michaelmas was thinking, would be to get pieces of other people's footage on stories Horse had also covered. A scan of the running figures in the mob, or the people advancing in front of the camera, would turn up many instances over the years of Watson identifiably taking positions ahead of other people who'd thought they were as close to the action as possible. If you didn't embarrass your sources by naming them, Domino could find a lot of usable stuff in a hurry. You could splice that together into quite a montage.

No, you'd open with a talking head shot of Watson tagging off: "And that's how it is right now in Venezuela," he'd be saying, and then you'd go to voice-over. Your opening line would be something like: "That was Melvin Watson. They called him Horse," and then go to your action montage. You'd rhythm it up with drop-ins of, say, Watson slugging the Albanian riot cop, Watson in soup-and-fish taking an award at a banquet, Watson with his sleeves rolled up as a guest teacher at Medill Journalism School, Watson's home movies of his wedding and his kids graduating. You'd dynamite your way through that in no more than 120 seconds, including one short relevant quote from the J class that

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would leave you only 90 for the rest of it, going in with Michaelmas shots of Watson at Maracaibo.

You'd close with a reprise of the opening, but you'd edit on the tags from as many locations as would give you good effects to go out on: "And that's how it is right now in Venezuela..." and then a slight shift in the picture to older, grimier, leaner, younger, necktied, cleaner, open-shirted versions of that head and shoulders over the years... "in Kinshasa...on board the Kosmgorod station...in Athens...in Joplin, Missouri...in Dacca..." And then you'd cut, fast, to footage from the helicopter that had followed Watson into the mountains: Blackened wounds on the face of the mountain and in the snow, wild sound of the wind moaning, and Michaelmas on voice-over, saying "and that's how it is right now."

The little hairs were rising on Michaelmas's forearms. It would play all right. It was a nice piece of work.

"We are nearly there, Laurent. Will I see you again?"

"Ah? What? Oh. Yes. I'm sure you have good directorial talent, and I know you have excellent qualities. There'll certainly be future opportunities."

"I was not talking business, Laurent. I was suggesting perhaps dinner."

He smiled and said: "That would be an excellent idea. But I expect to be leaving before dinner time, and I also have some things I must do first. Another time, it would be a very pleasant thing."

"*Domage,*" Clementine said. Then she smiled. "Well, it will be very nice when it happens, don't you think so?"

"Of course." He smiled. Smiling, they reached the front of the Excelsior and he thanked her and got out. As the car drew away, she turned to wave to him a little through the rear window, and he waved back. "Very nice," Domino said in his ear. "Very sophisticated, you two."

"I will speak to you in the suite," Michaelmas subvocalized, smiling to the doorman, passing through the lobby, waiting for the elevator, holding up his eyelids by force of the need to never show frailty.

In the cool suite, Michaelmas took off his suitcoat with slow care and meticulously hung it on the back of a chair beside the drawing room table. He put the terminal down and sat, toeing off his shoes and tugging at the knot of his tie. He rested his elbows on the table and undid his cufflinks, pausing to rub gently at either side of his nose. "All right," he said, his eyes unfocused.

"We're still secure here," Domino said. "Nothing's tapping at us."

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Michaelmas's face turned involuntarily toward the terminal. "Is that suddenly another problem to consider? I've always thought I'd arranged you to handle that sort of

There was a longish pause. "Something peculiar happened at the sanatorium. I was maintaining excellent linkages via the various commercial facilities available. I had a good world scan, I was monitoring the comm circuits at your terminal, and I was running action programs on the ordinary management problems we'd discussed earlier. I was also giving detail attention to Cikoumas et Cie, Hanrassy, UNAC, the Soviet spaceflight command, Papashvilly, the Watson crash, and so forth. I have reports ready for you on a number of those topics. I really haven't been idle since cutting away from your terminal."

"And specifically what happened to make you shift out?"

There was a perceptible diminution in volume. "Something."

Michaelmas raised an eyebrow. He reached forward gently and touched the terminal. "Stop mumbling and digging your toe in the sand, Domino," he said. "None of us are ever frightened. Now and then, we'd just like more time to plan our responses. Go on."

"Spare me your aphorisms. Something happened when I next attempted to deploy into Limberg's facilities and see what there was to learn. I learned nothing. There was an anomaly."

"Anomaly."

"Yes. There is something going on there. I linked into about as many kinds of conventional systems as you'd expect, and there was no problem; he has the usual assortment of telephones, open lines to investment services and the medical network, and so forth. But there was something — something began to happen to the ground underfoot as I moved along."

Michaelmas sucked his upper teeth. "Where were you going?" he finally asked.

"I have no idea. I can't track individual electrons any more readily than you can. I'm just an information processor like any other living thing. Somewhere in that sanatorium is a crazy place. I had to cut out when it began echoing."

"Echoing."

"Yes, sir. I began receiving data I had generated and stored in the past. Fefre, the Turkish Greatness Party, Tim Brodzik...that sort of thing. Sometimes it arrived hollowed out, as if from the bottom of a very deep well, and at other times it was as shrill as the point of a pin. It was coded in exactly my style. It spoke in my voice, so to speak. However, I then noticed that minor

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variations were creeping in; with each repetition, there was apparently one electron's worth of deviation, or something like that."

"Electron's worth?"

"I'm not sure what the actual increment was. It might have been as small as the fundamental particle, whatever that might turn out to be. But it seemed to me the coding was a notch farther off each time it...resonated. I'm not certain I was detecting a real change. My receptors might have been changing. When I thought of that, I cut out. First I dropped my world scan and my programs out of the press links, and then I abandoned your terminal. I was out before the speaker actually started vibrating to tell you I was leaving. I felt as if I were chopping one end of a rope bridge with something already on it."

"Why did you feel that? Did you think this phenomenon had its own propulsion?"

"It might have had."

"A...resonance...was coming after you with intent to commit systematic gibberish."

"It does sound stupid. But this...stuff...was— I don't know. I did what I thought best."

"How long were you exposed to it?"

"Five steps. That's all I can tell you."

"Humm. And is it lurking in the vicinity now?"

"No. It can't be. Simply because I dropped the press links first. I was worried it might somehow locate and hash up all my data storages. But since then it's occurred to me that if I hadn't, it could have taken any number of loop routes to us here. I consider we were just plain lucky. It's back in whatever Limberg equipment it lives in."

"Well, I'm glad of that. That is, if it *was* true that you were being stalked by the feedback beast of the fundamental spaces."

"That's gauche. It's simply that there's some sort of totally unprecedented system in operation."

"We've been assuming since last night that he has access to some peculiar devices."

"I've encountered malaprop circuitry a fair number of times in this imperfect world. What I'm concerned about is not so much what sort of device Limberg has access to. It's what the device has access to."

Michaelmas sighed. "I don't see how we can speculate on that as yet. I *can* tell you what happened. Not why, or how, but what. You ran into trouble that set upon you as fast as you can think. A condition common among humans. Even more common is having it advance faster than that."

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"Well, there at least I'm secure; unless of course, something begins to affect speeds within the electromagnetic spectrum."

"Son, there is no man so smart there is no man to take him."

"I wouldn't argue *that* for a moment."

"It's nice to have you back." Michaelmas pushed himself slowly away from the table and began walking about the room in his stockinged feet, his hands behind his back. "The Tass man," he said.

"The Tass man?"

"At the press conference. He didn't ask whether Norwood was being reinstated in command of the expedition. Nobody else did, either — Sakal had thrown a broad hint he wouldn't be. But if you were the correspondent of the Soviet news agency, wouldn't you want it nailed down specifically?"

"Not if I'd been instructed not to show it was on my mind."

"Exactly. They've made all their decision, back there. Now they feel prepared to spring traps on whichever perfidious option the immoral West chooses to exercise. You know, even more than playing chess, I dislike dealing with self-righteous chess players." Michaelmas shook his head and dropped down into the chair again. He sat heavily. It was possible to see that he had rather more stomach than one normally realized, and that his shoulders could be quite round. "Well — tell me about Fefre and all the rest of them. Tell me about the girl and the dolphin."

"Fefre is as he was, and I don't know what dolphin you're talking about."

"Well, thank God for that. What do you know about Cikoumas et Cie?"

"It's owned by Kristiades Cikoumas, who is also Limberg's chief assistant. It's a family business; he has his son in charge of the premises and making minor decisions. He inherited it from his father. And so forth. An old Bernaise family. Kristiades as a younger man made deliveries to the sanatorium. One day he entered medical school on grants from Limberg's foundation. The Sorbonne, to be exact."

"Why not? Why not settle for the very best? What a fortunate young man. And what a nice manner he's acquired in the course of unfolding his career."

"You've met him, then?"

"Yes, I've met him. It's been a while since he last shouldered a crate of cantaloupes. That package he's slipped off to US Always could be arriving almost any time, couldn't it?"

"It's been offloaded at Lambert Field and is enroute to the Cape Girardeau postal substation. If it's any good, her staff can have it in

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Hanrassy's breakfast mail. It's already a big day for her; she's scheduled to meet all her state campaign chairmen for a decision on precisely when to announce her candidacy. Her state organization are all primed, she has several million New Dollars in reserve beyond what's already committed, more pledged as soon as she wins her first primary, and two three-minute eggs, with croutons, ordered for breakfast. She will also have V-8 Juice and Postum."

Michaelmas shook his head. "She's still planning to use that dinosaur money?" A lot of Hanrassy's backing came from people who thought that if she won, the 120 mph private car would return, and perhaps bring back the $120,000-per-year union president with it.

"Yes."

"Damn fool."

"She doesn't see it that way. She's laundered the money through several seemingly foolproof stages. It's now grayish-green at worst."

"And her man's still in the United States treasury department?"

"Ready and waiting."

"Well, that's something, anyway." Treasury was holding several millions for her party, as it was in various other amounts for various others. It was checkoff money from tax returns, earmarked by her faithful. As soon as she filed her candidacy, it was hers...subject to a certain degree of supervision. Hanrassy's plan was to meld-in some of the less perfectly clean industrial money and then misreport her campaign expenditures back to her Treasury official. He'd certify the accounts as correct. Michaelmas's plan was to make him famous as soon as he'd certificated the ledger printout.

Domino said: "What we can do to her next year won't help today."

"I know." There weren't that many exploitable openings in US Always's operations. "She's quite something, really," Michaelmas said. "But perhaps we'll be able to manage something with whatever Cikoumas has sent her."

"Well, one certainly hopes so," Domino said.

"What about the Watson crash?" Michaelmas asked carefully.

"Negative. The European Flight Authority has taken jurisdiction. You'd expect that, since the original crash notification came out of their teleprinters with an Extra Priority coding added. They've autopsied the pilot and Watson; both were healthy and alert up to the time of impact. The flight recorder shows power loss without identified cause. It reports Watson's last words as 'Son of a bitch!'" The crash site was impounded and

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the wreckage taken to an AEV hanger here. It's too soon for their examiners to have generated any interoffice discussion of findings."

"Do you think perhaps the Watson crash was a true accident?"

"I have learned to suspect all crashes."

"When and where are the funerals?"

"The pilot was unattached, with no close relatives. She is being cremated by the canton; there will be a memorial service for her friends. I have sent a message in your name, citing the fraternity of news-gatherers."

"Thank you. And Horse?"

"He is being flown home this afternoon. There will be a family service day after tomorrow. Interment will be private. You have spoken with Mrs. Watson and have promised to visit in person as soon as you possibly can. I am holding a playback of the conversation, waiting for your convenience."

"Yes. In a while." Michaelmas got up again. He walked to the windows and back. "Get someone to buy five minutes' US time tonight for a Watson obituary. Here's how it wants to play:"

He paced back and forth outlining it. His hands seized and modeled the air before him; his face and voice played all the parts. When he was done he took a deep breath and sat down, rubbing his forearms, perspiration glistening in the arced horizontal creases under his eyes. "Do you foresee any production problems?"

"No...no, I can do it. I'm sure it could be very effective."

"'Could be?'"

"Well, isn't Watson's employer network going to do something along the same lines?"

"I don't know. Campion said he wasn't doing one. There are other people they could get. Maybe they'll want to take mine. Probably they'd rather do their own. But what difference would that make? *Billions* of people are familiar with Watson's personality. He's worked for every major outlet at one time or another. He's a public figure, for Heaven's sake!"

"Yes, of course. I'm starting to look into it." There was a pause. "Getulio Frontiere passed through the kitchen entrance surveillance systems a few minutes ago, and has taken a service elevator to this floor. He's coming here."

Michaelmas nodded with satisfaction. "Good! Now we're going to learn a few things." He stepped lightly across the room.

There was a soft rap on the door. Michaelmas opened it instantly. "Come in, Getulio," he said. Lightly taking Frontiere's elbow, he moved the man toward the table, put him in a chair, and

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sat down facing him. "All right, let's talk."

Frontiere licked his lips. He looked across the table steadily enough. "You must not be angry with us, Laurent. We did what we could in the face of great difficulties. We are still in serious trouble. I cannot tell you anything, you understand?"

Michaelmas pointed to the terminal. The pilot lights were dead and the switch marked OFF/ON was set on OFF.

Frontiere looked uncomfortable. He reached inside his jacket and brought out a flat metallic little device and put it down on the table. Two small red lights winked back and forth. "Forgive me. A noise generator. You understand the necessity."

"Without a doubt." Michaelmas nodded. "Now, speak, friend."

Frontiere nodded bleakly. "There is evidence the Soviets sabotaged Norwood's shuttle."

Michaelmas rubbed his eyes with his thumb and fingers. The breath, released from his diaphragm after a pause, hissed in his nostrils. "What sort?"

"When Norwood was boosting up for the orbital station, he noticed that Ground Control was responding falsely to his transmissions. He called them to say so and discovered they were responding as if his voice had said something perfectly routine. He could not get through to them. He began tearing away panels and tracing communications circuits. He found an extra component; one not shown on the module diagrams. He says it has proven to be a false telemetry sender of undoubtable Soviet manufacture. As Norwood was reaching for it, his booster systems board began showing progressive malfunctions cascading toward immediate explosion. He ripped out the sender, pocketed it, went to escape mode, and fired out in his capsule; the rest, as they say, is history."

Michaelmas put his hand behind his head and tugged hard forward against the stiffened muscles of his neck. "What is the scenario?"

Frontiere's voice was perfectly emotionless. "A timed destruct sequence and false telemetry in the module, backed by computerized false voice transmissions from an overhead station; probably from Kosmgorod. It was in an appropriate position, and the on-shift crew was almost 100% Soviet."

"And the Soviet motive?"

"To re-ignite Soviet nationalism and establish Communist preeminence under the guise of world brotherhood."

"You think so?"

Frontiere looked up. "What do you expect of me?" he said sharply.

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"Norwood says it, Norwood has turned over to us the Soviet telemetry sender, and Kosmgorod was in position. Using Limberg's facilities, Norwood has already made a computer simulation which times out to exactly that possible sequence. What do you think we were doing all night and morning? Washing our hands?"

Michaelmas's tongue made a noise like a dry twig snapping. "What are you going to do?" He got abruptly to his feet but then simply stood with his hand resting on the back of his chair and his eyes almost unseeing on the terminal, as it lay OFF upon the table.

"We don't know." Frontiere looked at Michaelmas with the wide eyes of a man staring out of a burning building. He shrugged. "What can we do? If it is true, UNAC is finished. If it is not true, what *is* true? Can we find what is true before UNAC is finished? Our own man is the best witness against us, and he is *absolutely* convinced. And convincing. To hear him speak of it is to doubt not one syllable. He has had months in hospital; his time has been spent analytically. Facts and figures issue from him unerringly. He is — he is like a man with an ax, chopping down the bridge across the world."

Michaelmas snorted. "Humm."

"You find it amusing?"

"No. No! Resume your seat, please. No offense was meant. I take it Josip ordered Norwood to be silent?"

"Of course. Josip has the sender and is enroute to Afrique Control to have it analyzed. Perhaps Norwood made an error in evaluation, using Limberg's facilities; perhaps better apparatus and better circumstances will show it is the counterfeit. Nevertheless, we halted Papashvilly from coming to Berne. He was at the aerodrome, boarding a courier craft to come here, and suddenly he is stopped at the gate by frantic staff people and hustled back to Afrique Control Complex. Dozens of people of all kinds saw it. We have very little time, Laurent. We have less than we might; we have the horse-eater, Limberg, to deal with."

Michaelmas's mouth twitched. "What of him?"

Frontiere held up a hand, its fingers spread. "What not of him? First, he holds Norwood and never says a word until he is fully assured everything is perfect. One has to wonder — had Norwood died would Limberg ever have told anyone? Had he been somewhat warped, would Limberg have sacrificed him like any other guinea pig? But never mind that. *Second,* he lets Norwood, for therapy — for *therapy* — construct for himself a little engineering analysis workbench in a corner somewhere.

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Third, he gives him time on a house computer to run the simulation so Norwood can have it all on a tape for us when Sakal says we need one. And so Limberg can have one too. Therefore, it would be unwise for UNAC to suppress this news on the *immoral* grounds of self-preservation." Frontiere's right forefinger thudded audibly as he ticked off each point on his left hand. He wiped his lips. *"Bruto,"* he said softly.

"And what do you think is his motivation?" Michaelmas asked.

"Glory. The little sniffer sees himself of millennial stature." Frontiere shook his head. "Forgive me, Laurent. You know I'm not like this often." He thudded his hand down upon the table. "The *truth!* He is the sword of *truth!*"

"And you are the fist of exasperation. What did you do when he exposed you to that?" Michaelmas said.

"Josip did it. He is not a man to lie down. First, he told Norwood that if one word of this got out before he had time to check it completely, one way or the other, there would never be the slightest chance of Norwood's going on the expedition. Then he told Limberg the press conference would take place immediately, and that not a hint of the accusations would be given. He wants as much time as possible before the American general public formulates its mass opinion. He said Limberg could talk as much as he wished about his medical abilities, but if he attempted anything more, it would be total war between Limberg and UNAC until one or the other exhausted its resources. And was that clear?"

Michaelmas pursed his lips. "And Limberg and Norwood agreed?"

"Why not? Norwood is under discipline as a UNAC assignee, and what has Limberg to lose? If a few hours go by and then the news gets out, Limberg looks better and UNAC looks worse than ever. For the sake of his *glory!* This tantalizer of birds, this connoisseur of things to be found in a garden, this — Laurent, please, you must do for us whatever you can."

"Yes, I must," Michaelmas said. "But what can that be?"

Frontiere's gaze steadied and he folded his arms. "You have always been a very good friend to us, Laurent. You have shared our ideal from the beginning. We understand the call for objectivity in your position. However, the fact is that anyone knows you have always been slow to accept anything detrimental and have been energetic in confirming what is good of us."

Michaelmas put up a hand swiftly. "Because taken day in and

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out, UNAC is one of the excellent and well-run ideas of the late 20th century." He studied Frontiere's expression, peering forward as if there were not quite enough light to show him all he wanted to examine. "What else are you hoping for? That Laurent Michaelmas will lend himself to whatever line UNAC directorship wants? Even if Norwood's story is proven true?"

Frontiere's lips were pale at the corners. "It may be proven untrue."

Michaelmas turned away. He stood with one hand on the wall, and looked out at the mountains. "Getulio, do you imagine the telemetry sender is not genuinely believed Soviet? Do you conceive that Limberg has lent his name and his actions to something like this, if he is not prepared to swear it was in Norwood's pocket when they hauled him from the capsule? Has he told you where the capsule is located?"

"Of course."

"And have UNAC technicians looked at it?"

"Certainly."

"And is the physical evidence consistent with everything Limberg and Norwood have told you?"

"Yes. But that's not yet proof—"

"Proof." Michaelmas turned sharply. "Proof will be conslusive when it comes. But you know what many people will believe even without proof. You know what many of them will believe must be done when there *is* proof. Getulio Frontiere, you're a good man in a good cause, yet you're on a shameful errand. And why? Not because there's final proof. But because there's already belief, and I can see it plain on your face. Thank you for trusting me, Getulio. I'll do what I can. That may be disappointingly little."

Frontiere stood up without looking at Michaelmas. He busied himself with putting the noise generator back in his pocket and turning toward the door. "*E bene,* we each do what we can," he said down to the carpet. "Sometimes we do what we must."

"*E vero,*" Michaelmas said, "but we must not go beyond the truth in doing what we can."

VIII

When they were alone again in the suite, Michaelmas went into the bathroom. He rummaged among his kit and found something for his stomach. He took it, went back to the drawing room, and looked at the terminal.

He sat down on the end of the Morris chair. "Why couldn't you tell me about Limberg's computer having made a simulated run on the shuttle flight?"

"I never reached that part of his

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storage. I didn't even know it existed."

"And you still don't, except by reasoning it out. Yes," Michaelmas voice was dull. "That's what I thought." He sat with his head at an angle, as if it were heavy for his neck. He thought, and his expression grew bereft. "It appears he has a screen for his better secrets. One might describe it as a means of actually taking hold of and redirecting individual incoming electrons. If oceans were waves and not water, but you know what I mean. I'd postulate that if the incoming probe were intelligent in itself, then, it might have the sort of subjective experience you've described."

"There's never been any such technique. No one monitoring Limberg has ever encountered it before. That includes me."

Michaelmas sighed. He held up his hand and ticked off fingers. "First," he said wearily, "no probes would ordinarily ever register it; they'd only be able to reach whatever Limberg wanted 'em to find, and the rest would simply be invisible. Which, second, incidentally documents the nature of dear Doctor Limberg's famous passion for privacy. He's not a virgin — he's a fan dancer. Third, more important, on this occasion there was something special; greater proximity, perhaps—"

"You're joking," Domino said. "Since when does the location of one of my terminals have anything to do with where I am?"

"I don't know," Michaelmas said. "I didn't build Limberg's system. But why are we surprised? Is it really unexpected to find something like this in the hands of Nils Hannes Limberg, famed research scientist savant pioneer?" Michaelmas shrugged. "Of course, if the method ever gets out and goes into general use, you and I are finished."

"He'd never let go of it while he's alive," Domino said quickly. "Meanwhile, we can be developing some countertechnique."

"If he lives long enough."

"If any of these suppositions are true."

"If truth is ever anything more than the most workable supposition."

They sat in silence for a moment. Domino tentatively said: "Do you buy it? Do you think the Norwood story is true?"

"Well, what do you think? Does it square with the available data?"

"Unless the telemetry sender turns out to be a fake."

Michaelmas shook his head. "It won't." He drummed his fingertips on the tabletop. "Can you clock back on Kosmgorod? Is it true they could have used Norwood's voice channel if the sender was cutting

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off spoken transmissions from his module?"

"Absolutely. I checked that while Fontiere was talking about it. There's no record of any such transmissions in the station's storage, but you wouldn't expect it to be there. I also checked UNAC Afrique's files of the ostensible receptions. They're on exactly the right frequency, in what you'd swear is Norwood's voice making routine astrotalk, and the signal strength is exactly what you'd expect from that type of equipment in flight. Of course, that's the sort of good job they'd do."

"And they really did all that just to get a Soviet name in the history books instead of an American one."

"Well," Domino said, "You know, people will do these things."

Michaelmas closed his eyes. "And we will do what we can. All right. Let's say I want to do a documentary on Papashvilly. Right away. Find a buyer, find Frontiere, set up interviews with Papashvilly, the UNAC bureaucracy, and all that. Norwood too. Norwood too — that's important. I haven't the foggiest notion of what this piece is about, and I don't care, but I want them holding Norwood for me. Get us into Afrique. Also stay atop the Hanrassy situation. Do what you can to keep tab on Limberg. For God's sake, keep me informed on what's happening inside the USSR." He slumped backward into the chair.

"Gervaise," Domino said.

Michaelmas's eyes opened. "What?"

"If I can arrange it, do you want Madame Gervaise's network and her crew?"

"No," Michaelmas said quickly. "There's absolutely no need for any such thing. We can use local talent and sell the job as a package. To anyone who meets my standards." He shut his eyes precisely and squirmed in the chair to settle himself. "Another thing," he said as he turned. His back was presented to the machine on the table, and his voice was muffled. "Find out when, why and for how long Gervaise was a patient at Limberg's sanatorium."

"All right," Domino said quietly.

It became quiet in the suite. The sunlight filtered through the drapes and touched the case of the terminal lying on the polished mahogany. Michaelmas's breathing became steady. A growing halfmoon of perspiration spread through the fabric of his shirt under the sleeve inset. The air conditioning murmured. Michaelmas began to make slight, tremblant moves of his arms and legs. His hands twitched as if he were running and clutching.

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"Hush, hush," Domino murmured, and the motions first smoothed and then were ameliorated almost completely.

In the quiet, the machine said softly:

"My bones are made of steel
The pain I feel is rust.
The dust to which your pangs bequeath
The rots that flourish underneath
The loving flesh is not for me.
Time's tick is but the breathing of the clock.
No brazen shock of expiration tolls for me.
Error unsound is my demise.
The worm we share is lies."

(To be concluded next month)

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ALGIS BUDRYS

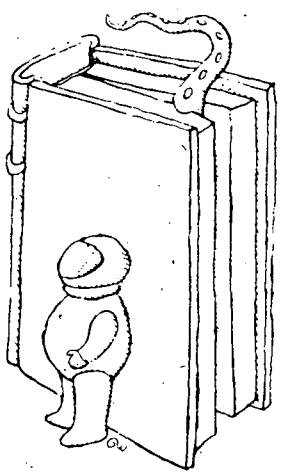
Books

Science Fiction Art, Bounty Books Division of Crown, 128 p., $9.95 Edited by Brian Aldiss

The Science Fiction Book, Seabury Press, 160 p., $14.95 Edited by Franz Rottensteiner

One Hundred Years of Science Fiction Illustration, Pyramid Books, 128 p., $4.95 Edited by Anthony Frewin

Fantastic Science-Fiction Art 1926-1954, Ballantine Books, 40 plates, $5.95 Edited by Lester del Rey



The accelerating expansion of scholarly interest in SF has merged with the general nostalgia fad and the special nostalgia for garish popular art styles. This has produced almost simultaneous publication of a large number of picture books, some of them with interpolated historical essays, all of them at least with footnotes which do more than simply identify the work. It's asking too much of a Brian Aldiss, for instance, to put together a large, effective collection of sometimes quite aptly juxtaposed or dramatically enlarged pulp artwork, without beginning with a philosophical rationale:

> "...sf and Gothic (writing) are basically intertwined. The same holds true for sf illustration."

And then, and only then, do we get the book, which, as it happens, I rather like because Aldiss and I appear to have the same prejudices as distinguished from critical bases. I would guess we have closely correlated reminiscences. I don't for a minute believe his statement. I didn't believe it as applied to sf writing. But in shaking my head fondly and chuckling over and suddenly becoming lost in associational memories as I turn the large (about 12″ x 15″) acceptably produced pages of this coffee table paperback, I don't care. It's

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obvious the editor understands pulp creativity, whatever he may think of it, and loves the genre, however he may rationalize it. As for his critical findings — which are set forth logically and systematically, if not in accordance with my prejudices — I doubt that five percent of the book's consumers will care a rap one way or the other, or pause to carp: "Damn it, there are *three* Leydenfrosts, and he should have mentioned the other two at least to distinguish all of them from each other."

Come to think of it, I expected Aldiss to mention Murphy Anderson, who took *Planet Stories, Planet Comics,* and significant portions of the rest of the Love Romances Publishing Co. empire by storm during World War II. Self-taught, apparently from bodybuilding magazines and movie still photographs, and in his middle teens, this Anderson (Not Lyman who did many postWar covers), drew with incredible enthusiasm and hardly any knowledge of the sophisticated tricks taught in commercial art schools. For eighteen months or so, he was in total command of the visual representation of every conscious and subconscious motif in science fiction adventure. Finally entering the US Navy, he apparently went to a school on the GI Bill after the war, turned into a dull hack, and is I believe still working for DC, no doubt cringing every time he recalls his youth.

But that's the level of my roommates' quarrel with the Aldiss book, which I do *not* intend to turn over to the PTA auction when this column has reached print.

Another book is more pretentious, dressed in hard boards for the library trade, better-produced, and dismaying. I would like to tell you a joke:

A man is walking down a street in Kansas City. A page from the London Times blows against his ankles. On it, he sees an advertisement offering a munificent reward for the return of a large shaggy dog. On the next corner, he finds a large homeless shaggy dog; gathers it up, with it takes a train to New York City, the *Queen Mary* to southampton, the train to London, and thence to the address in the ad. The door is opened in response to his urgent knock. The proprietor takes one look at the dog, says "Not *that* damned shaggy," and slams the door shut.

Now, I , on the other hand, have been calling for a historian of science fiction. When I don't get Professor J. Gunn, I get Franz Rottensteiner.

Rottensteiner, like almost all people who consume art and pride themselves on their analytical

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ability, but have no shred of creative talent, thinks that all worthwhile art has a purpose; that honest artists have creeds to which they react via the expression of their work, and that if honest logical persons with analytical minds will but sit down long enough to make lists long enough and cross-check them thoroughly enough, it will be possible to understand what the art itself is all about. I suspect that people like Rottensteiner are attempting to ratiocinate themselves into being artists. I can think of no punishment better suited to the crime.

Which is not to say there is no value in work such as Rottensteiner's approximately 9" x 12" *The Science Fiction Book,* "An Illustrated History." Like many another grab-bag, it is full of raw data — movie stills, magazine illustrations, attractive graphics — which, if treated as unclassified material found on an abandoned coffee table, make for a pleasant browse. It also begins with a panoramic essay on the history and nature of SF. The essay is drivel, but so elegantly organized that it sounds meaningful and might even be quoted with impunity in many scholarly circles:

> "This 'sense of wonder,' so often coupled with a child-like naivete, may correspond to the *thaumazein* of the ancient Greeks which according to Aristotle is the beginning of all philosophy and hence of all science.(*) What in the simple forms of science fiction may appear as simple-minded delight in the marvels of the universe, strangeness for the sake of strangeness, manifests itself in more sophisticated forms of sf as methodical doubt, the basis of scientific method."**

The classical tag may indicate the breadth of Rottensteiner's researches and the scope of his education. His idea that Aristotle's connotation for the term 'science' is apt here, and his conception of scientific method, reveal the depth of his understanding. But that preliminary jolt of *thaumazein* (read *vilbar,* or *soma,* for other evocative intellectual effects) may have numbed the discrimination of some readers sufficiently for them to briefly feel Rottensteiner is saying something sensible.

I don't think he is. Some people are very irked with him because he makes extravagant claims for

*"*Why did the fire hurt me, Mommy?*" "*Because you hadn't thought sufficiently on* noumenon *and* phenomenon, *darling. Now eat your nice liver.*"

**"*Albert, do you suppose* $E=MC^3$*?*" "*I doubt it, Isaac.*"

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Stanislaw Lem. I don't think he should do that without explaining in what ways Lem has advanced beyond Stanton Coblentz, whose work in the 1920s and '30s I feel closely prefigures the intellectual discoveries and literary techniques of Dr. Lem. But it seems more important that Rottensteiner is consistently open to question on almost *every* judgment he makes. His facts — the dates and places he gives, the literal reproductions of covers and inside illustrations, etc. — are capable of standing by themselves, and most of them are right, and perhaps even meaningful. Compared to the highly expensive recent similar production from Professor J. Gunn, they seem no worse than any other fragmentary map. It's when he uses that map to tell you where we came from and where we're going that you should wonder. Here's another passage, at random, like the first:

> "...Verne attributed mystical significance to many places on Earth: the poles, the center of the Earth and so on; and to 'be the first to be there' was of tremendous importance for his heroes; today's sf is also concerned with the sensational, the record-making effort, and seeks the 'meaning of the universe' as something to be found out among the stars rather than arrived at by introspection and reflection.

Now, this superficiality is inexcusable. Verne wrote during the last great age of geographic exploration; his heroes had to compete with real people on the order of Admiral Peary and Stanley and Livingstone; that is a sufficient reason, and hardly an intellectual or artistically philosophical one, for such books as *Dick Sand or A Captain at Fifteen,* just as his Anglophobia combined with his Martin Caidinism and his acute case of Michael Crichtonitis to produce *50,000 Leagues Under the Sea* and *Robur the Conqueror.*

Quarrel with my assessment of Verne though you may, there is no actual connection between the front end of Rottensteiner's assertion and its back half, which begins with that effortless crucial 'also' about today's sf. Today's sf, as Rottensteiner himself says in many other places, contains J.G. Ballard, Brian Aldiss, Tom Disch, and scores of others, including Dr. Lem, 'the most influential and most widely-read sf author of our day.' What Rottensteiner means is "that portion of what I choose to call 'today's sf' which will briefly support this particular judgment in this particular place." And that's not scholarship, no matter how glibly one quotes Aristotle.

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I do not expect to make the slightest change in the uses of sf scholarship. The world is full of people who will never stop trying to quantify creativity, or to apply dogmatic and dialectical standards to it. I believe that in many cases what underlies such an effort is a noble impulse; the desire to make more of one's intellect. But fiction is an art. In the long and crowded catalogue of SF, it is often stupid, barbaric, crude, in many circumstances mercenary, in many events a hoax upon the reader or an overt exercise in purely mechanical formulation. But as in any other art, there is that golden residue Sturgeon has spoken of convincingly.

The thing the Rottensteiners do not know is that even the worst hack cannot help what happens. The formula says there must be a hero, but the hack gave him a name, and eyes, and hair and scars; it says he must rescue the maiden, but as the hack describes her the high school girl stands before him, or the black and white actress when he was a high school boy; it says there must be a monster, but it is the individual hack who searches his own heart for what it is that frightens. Think, then, what happens when a first class artist approaches the work.

The need to bring things to life is given to some; the need to catalogue them is given to others. You cannot make one kind of the other. You cannot make a dolphin by drowning a fox; you cannot become as a soaring bird no matter how energetically you throw yourself into the air.

The Aldiss book is subtitled "Fantasies of SF," which of course reflects the editor's desire to make his exhibition come to some conclusion. Anthony Frewin contents himself with the straightforward title: *One Hundred Years of Science Fiction Illustration,* and so we expect no more than a survey. But instead we get more than we expect to see, not all of it worthwhile. Frewin is at least as whimsical a prosaist as is good for him, or for us, bouncily ranging from the cutesy to the pretentious:

> "...describes the literature as giving a Sense of Wonder (A chief characteristic of Surrealism — *vide* Andre Breton. But we will not go into *that!*)..."

and his book is coincidentally overdesigned, with some of the autointoxicated uses of photodistorted type one usually sees from bright recent graduates of design schools. It is approximately 8½" x 11½", uses more two-color and less four-color reproduction than its competitors, and, belying its title in

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another way, includes a sampling of truss ads, as well as some reproductions of *Science And Mechanics* and *Modern Mechanix* artwork which are not SF but almost purely Caidinistic. Obviously, Frewin takes his nostalgia where he finds it.

Nevertheless, its material on pre-magazine SF illustrators is extensive, apparently accurate, certainly interesting, and revelatory. It is far better for study purposes than the lesser amount of text devoted to this period by Aldiss, and evocative in its own right. Everybody has seen some Albert Robida reprinted (Damon Knight, an ex-illustrator, unearthed him early), but Frewin has the best and most perceptive essay on him, and the first essay I've read on Isidore Gerard ("Grandville"), as well as an excellent survey of the Victorian black-and-white illustrators who served Kipling's generation in the years just preceding Gernsback. Gerard having been born in 1803 or '04, Frewin picks him up in 1844 in order not to seriously exceed the bounds of his title. But in devoting nearly half the book's pages to pre-Gernsbackian SF art — and devoting them in an informative and entertaining manner — Frewin has made this a valuable and in many ways charming book.

This of its many aspects is out of harmony with the rest. There are the (essentially) same old Paul and Wesso illustrations for the nostalgia buff, the eccentric design for the avant garde fans, the prose style for the hip. (I rather like the illustrations, obviously do not care for rest). Of all these qualities, only the soundness of the pre-Gernsbackian material appears to justify buying this book rather than one of the others — the Rottensteiner has the best repro quality — and then, of course, only if you care as much for that sort of thing as I do. On my shelves, this will be a reference book for less frequent recollection.

I wonder if Frewin wanted to compile a more thoughtful book and was skewed into this project by editors who knew what the public wants?

Lester del Rey knows what part of the public wants. *Fantastic Science-Fiction Art, 1926-1954,* is beauty unadorned. 9″ x 11½″, this book begins with a historical Who What Where essay, then stands back and simply reproduces covers. Each 4c plate is printed on one side of good paper, and identified with a simple Who What Where caption on the otherwise blank opposite page.

Like all the other books, this one photographed actual magazines for use as original art. In the Aldiss and Frewin, this results in

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some really battered-looking work, some of it further fragmented by trimming either beforehand or to fit odd corners of the sometimes overcrowded pages. The del Rey also has some of this — the Morey cover for the April 1930 *Amazing*, for instance — but the magazines came from Ed Wood's formal collection, rather than from someone's cardboard box in the closet, and the covers, though scuffed, retain more of the brilliance which their cheap inks lost so readily in casual handling and storage. The reproduction is good — not up to the Rottensteiner, but perhaps more effective because each piece stands alone in its field of white, perhaps less dramatic on occasion than Aldiss's when he was able to blow up a digest-sized cover to heroic proportions.

For leafing and sitting, sitting and thinking and leafing, this is the book for the magazine SF nostalgist. Less broad than the Frewin, less contentious and tumultuous than the Aldiss, it says: "This stuff was eye-catching once; OK, let it catch your eye again without any hype from me." And provided you are a Frank R. Paul fan — which I guess I am gradually getting to be, after all, despite all resolve, but I do draw the line at Morey — effective and evocative it is, even with its emphasis on Paul.

It's curious to see the duplications — Bergey's Ark of Space, over and over again, but contrasted to a later, highly similar Schomburg in the Aldiss; Freas's first cover for *Astounding;* Roger's *Astounding* cover for *Fury.* Obviously, there is something of a consensus here.

And there are omissions. Murphy Anderson is forgotten. More strikingly, while Finlay and Stevens and (Hurrah, Brian!) Fawcette get their due, no one seems to have found the expert dry brush work of Ruby Moore for *Planet.* And no one remembers Robert Sherry's covers. Or Donnel, who did the black-and-whites to Bergey's covers for many years, and whom in my youth I redrew endlessly, until it became evident I had better find something else to do.

Thank you all; editors, artists, even you publishers. I am thrown back into my time; I am as a child in breathless repose.

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"Better get a replacement for Parker."

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An enchanting fish story from Richard Frede, a novelist and the author of The Interns, Entry E *and others.*

Theory and Practice of Economic Development: The Metallurgist and His Wife

by RICHARD FREDE

Horowitz was a metallurgist who lived in a small apartment in Forest Hills with his wife Betsy. They had no children and, according to Betsy, that was a good thing, considering how little money Horowitz made. Horowitz couldn't even give them a decent roof over their heads, Betsy would say, leaving it unclear as to whether she was referring to herself and Horowitz or to the unborn children. In the summer the air-conditioning unit usually failed by midafternoon, and by the time dinner was ready the apartment was hot and remained hot all evening long. In the winter the supply of heat was sufficient only to emphasize how little of it there was.

"Someday," Betsy would say, "you will be dead and I will take the money from the insurance and live in a better apartment." It was at such times that Horowitz wondered whether Betsy understood the concept of marriage. When he had first married her, Horowitz had had some fantasy of turning Betsy from base metal into gold, but if such an idea had indeed been a real one to him, it was the last project of any significant personal consequence which Horowitz considered undertaking in his adult life.

Horowitz worked in an auto parts manufacturing concern in Long Island City, and he was remarkable to his colleagues there for three reasons — his good will, his lack of ambition, and his patience with Betsy.

Weekdays Horowitz went back and forth between his home in Forest Hills and his work in Long Island City. On Sundays he and Betsy visited Betsy's widowed mother in the apartment in Manhattan in which Betsy had grown up. The apartment was on West Ninety-first Street which,

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Betsy would say, was no great shakes on anyone's list of preferred neighborhoods but was at least in the city.

Saturdays Horowitz kept for himself. "On Saturdays," Horowitz would say, "I renew myself." On Saturdays Horowitz went fishing. There was no kind of weather in which Horowitz would not go fishing so long as it was Saturday and the boat put out. He had a permanent reservation on a boat called the *Many Happy Returns*, and early every Saturday morning Horowitz went out to a far end of Brooklyn on Sheepshead Bay and was already waiting on the dock when the captain of the *Many Happy Returns* drove up with the day's provisions of sandwiches and beer.

One Saturday early in spring Horowitz left the apartment in Forest Hills and was out waiting at the dock even before first light. He had not been fishing in months, not since the *Many Happy Returns* had last put out in the fall, and he was so eager that the captain laughed at him. In apology the captain gave Horowitz a beer, which, given the earliness of the hour and the fact that Horowitz was not much of a drinker, may have accounted for why, in retrospect, the later occurrences of the day seemed more notable than they had at the time.

The morning became bright and warm, and the boat went out toward the horizon with only a few other fishermen aboard. The fishermen flexed their rods and changed their bait and made careful adjustments of their reels, but none of them was lucky enough or contrived to even get a bite. By the time the sun was nearly as high as noon, the fishermen had drunk a lot of beer and were mainly occupied in talk with each other. The captain cut the engines and let his boat drift and joined his guests.

Horowitz took a dropline with some lead sinkers and went up on the foredeck away from everyone else. He never gave much thought to it, but he enjoyed being alone. He lay on the deck on his stomach and dropped the line over the side until it had gone very deep. Then he lay there feeling the warm, rough deck beneath him. His left arm hung down over the side, the line wrapped around his index finger. He thought he could feel the ocean deeps through the line and his finger. Beside him, on the deck, was a can of beer. The air was still and hot, the water languid and gleaming, and Horowitz felt drowsy and happy and in want of nothing more in the world than the world had allotted him for this moment.

And it was at that moment that there was such a mighty tug on the dropline that Horowitz was in fear

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of losing his finger. Then, just as suddenly, there was no tension to the line at all. But as Horowitz looked over the side into the water, a large flounder about twice the size of any flounder Horowitz had ever seen before, surfaced next to the dropline. The fish had a hook and line in its mouth, and it seemed to gaze up at Horowitz and to judge him. After some little time the fish said, "Would you kindly remove your hook from my mouth?"

Horowitz — either because the beer and his tiredness and his contentment had made him immune to notice of the phenomenal, or simply because of his own natural good will and politeness — made no comment about the fish speaking to him, but only said, "Of course. But wouldn't it be better if I just cut the line?"

"If you leave the hook in," said the fish, "I run a much greater risk of infection."

So Horowitz reached down with a net on a stick and scooped the fish out. "Try to be careful," said the fish as Horowitz worked the hook about. "I don't like pain."

After a while Horowitz got the hook out, and with that completed he began to appreciate the unlikelihood of the experience he was having. He looked at the fish and the fish looked at Horowitz.

"I am an enchanted businessman," said the fish.

"Im sorry to hear that," said Horowitz. "Is there anything I can do to help?"

"Let me go," said the fish. "I'd only give you an upset stomach or worse."

Horowitz sighed. "All right, I'll let you go. It's probably just as well. My wife doesn't like me to bring fish home anyway. But before I throw you back, can I ask you a question?"

The fish became wary. "Just one," said the fish. "And I don't promise to answer."

"Well," said Horowitz, "you're obviously a very smart fish, exceptionally bright. What I don't understand is, why did you go after my bait?"

"I thought I could get away with it," said the fish. "That's how I got where I am today. Now, if you'll just—"

"Of course," said Horowitz, and he lowered the fish back into the water. The fish plunged out of the net, but instead of submerging or swimming away, he gazed back at Horowitz.

"Look," said the fish, "I suppose I owe you one."

Horowitz shrugged. "Like I say, my wife isn't fond of fish."

"Call it an obligation," said the fish.

"Okay," said Horowitz. "So one day you'll do something for me. In the meantime, take care."

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"Sure," said the fish. "You too," and he disappeared under the water leaving behind some small, bloody bubbles.

"And get someone to look at that cut," said Horowitz to the water.

The day remained warm but it soon turned gray and the wind stood and the captain said, "I don't believe it, but it looks like a thunderstorm coming," and in the distance there was the sound of thunder. The fishermen reeled in their lines and gathered behind the captain at the wheel and went on drinking beer as the captain hurried them back to land.

When Horowitz got home his wife was on the phone complaining to her mother about how hot the apartment was and it wasn't even summer yet. When she saw Horowitz come in she got off the phone and started complaining to Horowitz about how hot the apartment was and it wasn't even summer yet. While Horowitz, after the contrariness of the sea during the return to Brooklyn, was just glad that the apartment was so steady.

Betsy said to him, "All afternoon it's been getting hotter and hotter. While you were out on the nice, cool ocean, here the apartment was getting hotter and hotter and it's only April. I got to thinking about all the people we've known who lived in this building and moved away. Do you know that everyone we've known in this building has moved away? Everyone we knew at all well? There were the McNallys," she said. "To start with there were the McNallys." The McNallys had been their neighbors across the hall when Horowitz and his wife were just married and had moved to the building. "They live on Park Avenue now," said Betsy. "In the eighties." McNally, while he had been their neighbor, had studied for three years and become a Certified Public Accountant and then had gone on and studied for three more years and become a lawyer, all the time holding a part-time job. Mrs. McNally had worked full-time, and they had had two children as well, and every moment when McNally wasn't working, he was studying or going to school or taking care of the kids. "Is that any way to live?" Betsy had asked. Now Betsy said, "McNally has great ambition. That's how they got to Park Avenue."

And then there had been the Fostors and the Silverbergers and the Simonettas and the Deuchnesses. Harry Fostor had gotten into the photographic supply business, and he and his wife, a woman Betsy could not abide because she wore tight pants, also now lived on Park Avenue. "Harry Fostor," Betsy said, "didn't care

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who he stepped on to get where he is today." Her tone, in speaking of Fostor, was respectful. "Park Avenue is where he is today," said Betsy, "also in the eighties."

Frank Silverberger had been a young research physicist when they had known him in the building. Then he had discovered something about the way air flows over irregular surfaces, and a huge aviation company had gotten him to move to California. There they gave him a house on top of a mountain and a computer to work with all day, and his wife had written Betsy that their neighbors on each side were movie stars. Enrico Simonetta had made some money in the four-color printing business, and he and his family had moved to a house in Connecticut. Carl Deuchness had gotten into importing Japanese television sets, and he and his wife lived on Fifth Avenue now. "In the *sixties,*" Betsy said.

Horowitz thought about it and then said, "There are people who used to live in this building we've never even heard of again when they left. What's for dinner?"

"I thought you were bringing home fish."

"I thought you didn't like fish," Horowitz said.

"Did I ever throw it out?" Betsy said.

Horowitz didn't know what to say to this, and so he remained silent.

"What do you want?" Betsy said. "Should I send out for Chinese?"

While they were waiting for the Chinese delivery, Horowitz said, "Speaking of fish, something funny happened today out on the boat." And he told his wife about the fish he had caught and what he and the fish had said to each other.

Horowitz thought his wife would most likely tell him he was crazy or that at least she would ridicule his story in some way, but when he was finished she seemed to ponder what he had told her. She was still pondering it when the Chinese arrived, and then she didn't eat anything; she just sat and smoked while Horowitz ate. Finally she said, "The fish said he owed you one, right?"

"That's what he said," Horowitz said.

"Well, if he said it, we'll take him at his word," said Betsy. "Tomorrow you go back and speak to this fish."

"I have nothing to say to him."

"I'll tell you what to say."

"I wouldn't know how to find him."

"You charter the same boat, go to the same place, put down the same line. You think the fish is going to move to Florida overnight?"

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So the next day Horowitz went out on the boat again and got the captain to make for the area they had been to the day before. Again there were very few fishermen aboard, and Horowitz, who was self-conscious about his errand, was quite glad about that. The day was much as the day before, bright and calm, and the fishermen, who had not gotten a bite all morning, were just as pleased, when the time came, to sit and drink beer and exchange stories with the captain while the boat drifted.

Horowitz went up on the foredeck and lay down on his stomach and dropped his line over the side. He no longer especially believed in what seemed to have happened the day before, and it occurred to him, since things were so much the same as the day before, that perhaps it still *was* the day before and he had just awoken from a brief nap. But then the fish broke the water and gazed up at Horowitz.

"So soon?" said the fish. "You looked to me like a type who wouldn't come back."

"My wife sent me," said Horowitz.

"Well," said the fish, "why did she send you?"

"To ask you a favor."

"What is it?"

"Well, first she thought she'd just ask you to make the air conditioning work. But then she got thinking about it, and she decided to ask for a whole new apartment instead."

"All right," said the fish, "it's —"

"Wait," said Horowitz, "there's more. She wants the apartment to be on Park Avenue."

"All right," said the fish.

"In the seventies," said Horowitz.

"Is that all?" said the fish.

"Fully furnished in modern and with a live-in maid," said Horowitz, "and that's it."

"Go home," said the fish. "It's in the mail." Then the fish went under the water, the sky turned dark, the sea became choppy, and the captain took his boat speedily back to land.

"In the *mail?*" said Betsy when Horowitz got home. "Don't you know when you're being *lied* to?" and she wouldn't speak to Horowitz for the rest of the evening, except to complain about how hot the apartment was.

But on Monday she called Horowitz at the office and said, "I just went down for the mail, and you'll never guess. Remember I filled out that thing in the mail where you don't have to subscribe to the magazine to enter, but you just send it back to see if you won a prize? Well. when you get home, you can pack your bags because I just won an apartment on Park

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Avenue and Seventy-second Street and it's furnished modern and there's a live-in maid comes with it, too."

So Horowitz moved to Park Avenue and Seventy-second Street, and after a couple of weeks he couldn't see that it made any difference except that it meant a longer and more tiring commute for him to Long Island City. And if the apartment was different, Betsy was soon the same. Park Avenue just wasn't what she had expected it to be. It was a disappointment, it had failed her. And the maid talked back and modern furniture wasn't to her taste after all.

One day Horowitz got home from the auto parts manufacturing concern, and Betsy was waiting for him. "Tomorrow," she said, "is your fishing day, and I think you should have a talk with your friend the fish."

"Why?" said Horowitz.

"I ran into Sally Simonetta. She has a big house in Connecticut. It's much nicer than having an apartment in the city, she says. There's room for the children to grow —"

"We don't have any children."

"— and you can grow things and watch the seasons change. And her next-door neighbor is a famous writer. So tomorrow you ask your friend the fish. A house in Connecticut. With good neighbors. Celebrities."

"He's done enough," said Horowitz.

"You saved his life," said Betsy. "The way I see it, he can never do enough."

The next day the clouds were already gathering as Horowitz's captain — for a bonus — maneuvered his boat into the fish's neighborhood.

As soon as Horowitz lay down on the foredeck and peered over the side, the fish surfaced and glared at him. "You should be ashamed of yourself," said the fish.

"I am," said Horowitz.

"Ashamed," said the fish. "A grown man talking to a fish. What if someone saw? Well, what is it?"

"My wife wants a house in Connecticut," said Horowitz. "With famous neighbors."

"Go home," said the fish, "it's in the mail."

On the way home there was a storm.

On Monday, Betsy called Horowitz at work and said, "That's some fish. When you get home tonight, we're moving to Old Greenwich, Connecticut."

In Connecticut, Horowitz found that he was master of more than he wanted to survey. In addition, the commuting to Long Island City was arduous — there seemed to be no direct way to get from Old Greenwich to Long Island City. Still, if Betsy had finally found a

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home in which she could be comfortable, Horowitz was willing to put up with the attendant difficulties of his getting to and from work.

Then one night before Horowitz was going fishing the next day, after not too many weeks in Old Greenwich, Betsy said, "I want you to take a message to the fish for me."

"But you have this beautiful estate and —"

"I'm bored."

"You can watch the seasons change here."

"We've been here for weeks and I haven't seen a season change yet."

"You have the famous neighbors you wanted."

"What neighbors? They're all so famous they're never home, they're always on some airplane."

Horowitz had been worried about this. He had been having a recurrent nightmare. In the nightmare Betsy had run into her old neighbor from the old apartment house, Gloria Silverberger, the one who was married to the physicist with the house on top of a mountain in California. Horowitz dreaded the idea of commuting from California to Long Island City, something that might be all right for an ambitious tycoon but which wasn't all right at all for a poor metallurgist who just wanted to stay in one place.

Betsy said, "I was shopping yesterday in the city and I ran into Olive Deuchness outside her apartment house on Fifth Avenue and Sixty-third Street. She says Fifth Avenue and Sixty-third Street is very convenient."

At least it's closer to Long Island City than Old Greenwich, Horowitz thought. Or California.

"The fish has been more than generous," Horowitz said. "I really can't ask him for anything more."

"*Can* and *will*," said Betsy, and when Horowitz went out with the captain the next day, the waters were already boiling, there were no other fishermen aboard, and Horowitz had had to give the captain what was nearly two months of his own salary at the auto parts concern to get him to go out at all.

Tossing and rolling on the backs of the waves, his white belly streaming with surf, the fish glared up at Horowitz and said, "We're going to have to stop meeting like this."

"I can't help it," said Horowitz. "If you only knew my wife."

"What's the address this time?" said the fish.

"Fifth Avenue and Sixty-second. A duplex. The help should live in, they should be married and they shouldn't talk back. And maybe you can fix it that Betsy becomes President of the United States, she's taken an interest in politics."

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"Senator," said the fish. "The country isn't ready for a lady President yet. And she'll have to run for office like everyone else, but tell her she can rest assured it's all in the mail."

The voyage back to land was so hazardous, the waters of Sheepshead Bay so tempestuous, that the captain, who had taken to blaming Horowitz for the foul weather which always seemed to attend Horowitz recently, promised Horowitz he'd never take him anywhere again, not even across the street.

"That's okay with me," said Horowitz, "the last place I want to go again is anywhere."

So Horowitz went home, and on Monday his wife called him at the office and said, "Go to Fifth Avenue and Sixty-second tonight, the doorman will tell you which apartment, that's where we're living now, and the governor dropped me a note and asked me if I'd run for the U.S. Senate, and so I called him up and we're having dinner with him, so don't be late."

By this time Horowitz had taken to drink. Often, late in the evening in the apartment on Fifth Avenue after Betsy had gone to bed, he held long silent conversations with the fish in which he explained himself to the fish and the fish forgave him for asking for so much and told him he was basically a good person. In the morning, with or without a hangover, it was always a pleasure for Horowitz to get on the subway and go out to Long Island City. Then when he got home at night to Fifth Avenue and Sixty-second Street, Horowitz felt so uncomfortable that he used the delivery entrance.

On election night, after her opponent had made his concession speech on television and while her supporters were waiting in a hotel ballroom for her to come and give a victory speech, Betsy sat in her bedroom in the duplex and smoked and looked out across Central Park to the lights in the buildings beyond. She still hadn't gotten into the gown she had had made for the victory celebration. After several cigarettes she said to Horowitz, "This is all great, of course, but really it's a bore already. I want you to go see the fish tomorrow."

"Tomorrow's Wednesday," said Horowitz.

"He's got a calendar down there? You go tell the fish I've changed my mind, I've decided to be President after all and for him to get it in the mail."

Horowitz tried to argue with his wife, but her fury and determination when he opposed her finally overwhelmed him, and he agreed to see the fish on the following day.

But first he went out and got drunk. The man next to Horowitz at the bar was every bit as drunk as

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Horowitz was, and so Horowitz decided it was safe to tell the man about the fish, a communication Horowitz had been longing to make to another person for some time. The man listened to Horowitz with increasing sobriety, and when Horowitz got to the part about being married to the woman who had just been elected to the Senate and the fish had arranged it all through the mail, the man quietly paid up his bar bill and left.

The next day torrents were falling, the wind slashed the waterfront, waves like boulders smashed on the docks, and Horowitz spent the better part of the morning before he found a charter captain drunk enough to take him out.

When he had directed the captain to about where he wanted to go, Horowitz leaned over the side and discovered that the fish was already waiting for him.

"Tell her she's *had* it," bellowed the fish. "Tell her on Monday she'll be back in the apartment in Forest Hills and lucky to be there!"

Horowitz said, "Fish, all this time I haven't asked for one thing for myself, right?"

"You're entitled," said the fish, "but then that's it; you can come out here with a Russian trawler and you won't even find me with electronics. So what is it you want?"

"*I'd* like to be back in the apartment in Forest Hills."

"Like I said, it's in the mail," said the fish.

"But my wife, it would be nice if she could stay in the apartment on Fifth Avenue. As a sort of divorce settlement," said Horowitz.

"Oh, sure," said the fish. "Very generous of you. Let her have the apartment on Fifth Avenue. What do you care? *You* don't have to pay the rent." The fish gazed at Horowitz. "Look, I'll tell you what I'll do. You get the old apartment in Forest Hills, and I'll throw in the divorce and reasonable alimony, considering there are no children. She can get along okay if she lives with her mother on West Ninety-first Street. All this," said the fish, "just so long as I never see you again. Understood?"

Horowitz nodded. There were tears on his face quite distinct from the rain.

"Okay," said the fish. "It's in the mail."

So Horowitz and his wife got a divorce, and Mrs. Horowitz went to live with her mother on West Ninety-first Street, and it was just the way it would have been if Mr. Horowitz had died and left his wife a little money from insurance, except that Horowitz was alive and working as a metallurgist in Long Island City and happily going home to a small apartment in Forest Hills.

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From Don Trotter: "I graduated from Kansas State University not long ago and am currently in graduate school studying Clarke's Law and physics in about equal proportions. I have played semi-pro clarinet and once spent an unforgettable summer watching wheat dry." His first story for F&SF is a brisk and funny space opera narrated by one colorful computer . . .

Call Me Maelzel

by DON TROTTER

I could hear water splashing on the deck in Lloyd's shower, then the slap of his feet on the wet tiles. I had planned to zap him right away, but he started singing in his wheezy tenor that song about the sailor who's spent a year and a quarter in his ship's crow's-nest and he goes up the river to see Budapest... but you probably know it. "Yardarm Arnie?" Anyhow, it's a particular favorite of mine, and it sounded kind of nice echoing around in Lloyd's shower stall. So I let him finish first, and on the final "...mizzen mast, tooooo!" I cut off the hot water and ran up the pressure on the icy as high as it would go. Exit Lloyd, raging wet.

"Goddarnit, Mazey! This time ..." he started in, mad as a kicked kitten.

I hit the decompression warning in his cabin, a basso profundo WHOOT! WHOOT! that totally drowned him out. I think he might have called my bluff, but for realism I dropped the air pressure a little, just enough to make his ears pop, and let the emergency airbag fall from its recess in the ceiling. It was as convincing as hell, if I do say so myself.

The Book saith that all personnel shall be within an airbag not more than five seconds after the decompression warning. Lloyd had always beat that by about three seconds in drills before, but this time it was nearly ten before I heard him squeak the seal. A few seconds after that he scruffled, embagged, out into the lounge on the way to his duty station, aft. I bolted the door behind him.

I had an eye in the lounge. It was obvious why Lloyd had been so slow. He had stopped to put on a pair of shorts beneath the transparent airbag. They were soaking thru.

He took in the scene in the

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lounge and realized what I'd done to him. He turned and started fumbling at the locked door behind him, hoping to get out before anyone noticed. It was a forlorn hope; Sash and Tilly had been grinning and gawking respectively ever since he came in.

He was mostly hidden by a hologram of a clump of split-leaf philodendron, but Clarisse caught sight of him anyway and swam over to catch her arms on the edge of the pool and gaze admiringly up at him. Chyme was playing Liszt to herself thru earphones, though, and I had Juan down a rook and two pawns (and mate in seven); so neither of them had noticed a thing. Not wanting them to miss the sight of Lloyd standing there with his ears slowly turning red, I subtly called their attention to it. I changed the overhead from "Amazon Rain Forest, Late Afternoon" to a detail from Michelangelo, Jehovah's eye, huge, filling the ceiling, staring down at Lloyd. The change in lighting got their attention, and Lloyd, dripping wet, wrapped in plastic, held it. I changed the holo he was hiding behind from philodendron to a miniature burlesque stage and opened the curtain. He whirled around.

Clarisse *may* have struggled valiantly to keep from commenting. Snow *may* be drifted three feet deep against Beelzebub's doorway. "Very fetching, Lloyd," she said evilly. "I particularly like the way the little drops of water glint on your skin... but I don't think they're wearing codpieces this season." Lloyd's face caught fire from his ears. Five kinds of laughter fanned the flames. He fumbled again at the door behind him. Still locked. He decided to try to brazen it out.

"Neither am I, honey," he leered back at her. It was a pretty sickly leer.

"Liar." Chyme made it a flat statement of fact. It got her a sideways glance from Clarisse. Tilly sat stone-faced, feeling guilty for having laughed before. Sash wore the biggest grin I'd ever seen on that end of a human.

"'Braggart' would perhaps be more accurate," Juan corrected her. "Or possibly even 'honest man'... you know it may be significant that there's no single word for that concept, but 'liar' is in such common use that its not only a single word, but a short one." As I'd anticipated, Juan was quenching things before they got out of hand. "I presume it was Mazey again?"

"Of course it was Mazey," Lloyd said peevishly. "Do you think I *like* running around in skivvies and Saran wrap?" He'd struggled halfway out of the wet-sticky airbag.

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"Our own resident gremlin," Clarisse said disapprovingly. They were starting to gang up on me now. Also as anticipated. She apported up out of the pool in one easy motion and started to squeeze water from the skirt of her bathing dress.

"The bitch glitch," Sash agreed with her. "And with one hell of a short memory, considering."

"Sash!" Tilly reproved her husband.

He looked unrepentant. "'Bitch' is standard usage for a female glitch, darling, just like for a female dog."

"Possibly. But 'glitchette' conveys the same information and is less offensive. I wish you'd remember that next time... but I hope there won't be one. That was a very naughty thing for her to do."

"I agree," said Juan, "and suggest that Durance Vile is appropriate. Lloyd?"

"Yes! A whole day."

"Too much," Chyme said. "Three hours."

"A day." Lloyd was insistent.

A day was a lot more than I'd bargained for. I blinked Jehovah's eye at them to get their attention. "Now just a minute, folks," I said. "That's hardly fair."

Juan ignored me. "Your choice, Lloyd." He addressed me: "Mazey, Priority Command Durance Vile. One day. Run."

"Run!" Lloyd echoed.

"Run," Sash and Tilly said almost together.

"Run," said Clarisse. "And turn off that damned eye. It's starting to bug me."

"Run," said Chyme. And that was six out of six. They cut me off just as I was getting my arguments marshaled. My view of the lounge vanished, and I went blind in all my other eyes as well, all over the ship. And worse yet, I couldn't talk back anymore or even listen to them if I wasn't specifically addressed. For a whole *day*. Do you kow how many *picoseconds* that is? One whole hell of a lot. Especially if you're spending them in solitary. And it *wasn't* fair either. The most I'd ever gotten before was six hours, and that was the time I'd pulled the fire-disaster alarm (TWEETY WHOOP! TWEETY WHOOP!) in the Watenabe's bedroom at a *most* inopportune time. I knew it was inopportune, I'd listened very carefully to make sure it was. Sash and Tilly had been mad, but they'd seen the funny side of it too, or at least Sash had, and *they* hadn't given me the maximum sentence. Sometimes I think Lloyd will never learn how to take a joke.

I got even with them though. I didn't change the ceiling before I left, so they had Jehovah's eye staring down at them the whole time I was gone.

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You can call me Maelzel. Or Mazey for short. That's not my real acronym, its my social, or programming one. My real acronym looks like the name of a Czech mathematician and sounds like a garbage can trying to sneeze. So Dr. Turkell dubbed me "Maelzel," after the character in the Poe story. His idea of a joke. It also shows the limits of his intellect, since "Maelzel" was the name of the *owner* of the mechanical chess player, not the man inside. To be consistent, he should have called me "Schlumberger." I'm just as glad he didn't.

What I am is a victim of overcompensation. When al-Zahiri discovered hyperspace, even the most encysted Members of the Assembly were enraptured by the possibilities. Starships! In our lifetimes. Incredible. Some of the Members could even remember seeing Armstrong land on the Moon, and now *this*. In a burst of enthusiasm they authorized formation of the Bureau of Interstellar Exploration and voted it funds to build a starship. Being unversed in the economics of interstellar travel, they picked a nice round figure. A trillion yen. Ought to be more than adequate.

Turned out it wasn't. The Bureau politely explained that you just couldn't build a decent starship for that. They needed more money. ("*More* than a *trillion yen*, Director Mogenal?" "Yes, please. I want some more.")

They didn't get it. Turned out you *could* build a starship for a trillion yen, if you weren't fussy about quality. Not right but Tuesday, almost is good enough, it'll work if you bang on it. Let bids for spit and bailing wire. Director Sutherland brought *Persephone* in for 990 billion and change.

She left for Tau Ceti. All that came back was a fragment of a bleak, bitter message.

Heads rolled like a bowling alley. The next time around, nothing was too good for Our Wonderful Bureau and its Brave Astronauts. ("Four trillion, Director Kittermann? Are you sure that's sufficient? Possibly a bit more...?") *Fellow from Kent* had a forged diamond hull, lasers big enough to light God's pipe, and bulkhead-to-bulkhead carpeting. Quintupally redundant circuitry and 10,000 liters of good red wine. And when you're got that kind of cash to play around with, you don't pinch pennies on the computer. Oh, no. Only the best will do, the biggest, fastest, most chrome-encrusted computer made. Me. Poor little Mazey. Never mind the fact that I was built to talk physics with Einstein, write poetry with Eliot, play duets with Rubenstein. Pretend you don't know that I'm gigabytes smarter and decades

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faster than the computer who runs the Library of the Assembly. Disregard the truth that I can run this ship with both neuristors tied behind me. Act as if my being stuck here running this little carbon-crystal cruiser isn't as much waste of talent as Toscanini conducting a kazoo chorus. Just be godawful sure you don't look as if you're cutting corners.

So here I sit, staring off into hyperspace (which is about as exciting as being buried in Cream of Wheat), while my subconscious flushes the toilets and steers around singularities. About all I've got to do is keep tabs on a half-dozen humans, keep them safe from ghosties and ghoulies and the common cold. And from time to time I try to enrich an otherwise deficient psychological environment. When they'll let me play with them. But right now, I have no thumbs, and I must twiddle.

86,400,000,000,000,000. That's how many picoseconds in a standard day. I'm sure. I counted every blessed one of them. And when the last zero turned over, it was eyes wide open, ears perked, and Operation Hippo goes into effect.

Hippo was an idea I'd had while I was in solitary. I started turning the ship's gravity up very, *very* slowly, about one percent in twenty-four hours. Like the Chinese proverb about how to boil a frog, the change was so gradual they didn't really notice it. But in a week every human on board was maybe eight or ten pounds heavier, and thinking about diets and exercise. At the end of the second week they were between fifteen and twenty-five pounds heavier, living on grapefruit and celery, and churning the pool to froth. Even Tilly allowed herself to be coaxed in. And by the end of the third week... but I didn't get that far. Chyme started wondering why her ribs were beginning to show at a hundred forty when they hadn't at a hundred twenty, and minutes later they were voting to throw me back in the klink again. But they barely got started.

We went SWOOOOOOOOOP, pulled about three g's positive and two negative in very rapid succession, enough to bounce my would-be jailors around sickeningly and splash the pool half dry, then rattled fore and aft, although not so strongly, for a few seconds longer. Chyme whooped her waffles.

I pulled the emergency stations alarm (bleetBLEETbleetBLEET). I wanted everybody in his disaster shell right *now*. I didn't know what had happened, but it was for sure we hadn't run over a log in the road.

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I was thoroughly cussed out for my trouble. Nobody moved an inch toward the disaster shells.

"That wasn't even a little funny, Mazey." *Juan* was angry. "Durance Vile, *one day,* run."

But I wasn't paying much attention. The emergency overrides would keep them from throwing me into the dungeon, and I had other things to think about. The mass-proximity alarm was announcing the arrival of whatever it was that had treated us to that roller coaster ride.

It was very surprising. Surprising, hell, it was impossible. The hyperspatial equations allow exactly one three-space mass, us, per hyperuniverse. But there was something out there, just beyond the limits of resolution of my biggest eye, tiny with distance. But it *couldn't* be distant. The edge of the universe was only four kilometers and a standing broad jump away. Nonetheless, it was there, a minute massive speck against a bland milky background, as out of place as a cockroach in scuba gear in your tomato soup. It was growing larger.

Chyme somehow managed to make her "Run!" withering. It was the sixth and final vote.

"Not right now, children. I want everybody in his disaster shell RIGHT NOW! I ain't foolin'. We got problems." They still didn't move. Juan looked perplexed and gave me that "Priority Command Durance Vile" routine again, and they started another vote. Sash just sat there with that big dumb grin on his face, and the others ranged from disgusted to boiling. They absolutely would not move.

Well, if they wouldn't take my word for it, I'd just have to show them. I irised the shields on the ceiling and let them look out thru the dome. The intruder was big enough to show a visible disk now, if you knew where to look. I circled it with a red halo for them. "Shut up and look a minute! That yo-yo right there (I blinked the halo) just bounced us around but good, and he's closing on us fast. So if you people aren't in your disaster shells in about five seconds flat, you're going to wish to hell you had been." They were making me mad. I wanted to hit them with the heel of my hand to get my buck back. They just weren't working like they were supposed to.

Finally, after what seemed like hours, they started to move in the right direction, then broke and ran as in seconds the intruder swelled enormously and filled the dome as he came alongside. A lumpy, knobby hemisphere of rusty-looking iron, with portholes studded randomly over it's much-patched surface, he was half as big as we were, and orders of magnitude less

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esthetic. But when I hit him with my lasers, he turned mirror-bright all over and just reflected them off, then gave us a little love pat, a reddish-green flash that burned a four-foot hole in the wine storage tank and bounced us around again. I got the message and quit trying to lase him. He turned back into bad rusty sculpture.

Then, before my recalcitrant charges could regain their feet, we had more company. I didn't have an alarm for "repel boarders," but that was what I needed. At each of the four cardinal points of the lounge a tall skinny character appeared, back to the bulkhead, little round shield and big swashbuckling cutlass poised, ready to slay dragons or die trying. At the sight of my crew strewn all over the carpet they relaxed their defensive attitudes, and a couple of them started laughing. The one over by the aquarium, apparently the leader, swaggered over to where Sash was lying, half stunned, against the bar. He poked him with his cutlass.

"On your feet, reptile," he said without rancor. Sash climbed slowly to his feet, then, with apparent effort, put his grin back in place. He looked his captor in the eye, then returned the careful eying the other was giving him.

Our uninvited guests were worth looking at. Two men and two women, each a shade under seven feet and several shades under two hundred pounds, they were as bald as a bar of soap and naked as a porno flick; nude, but not lewd, they were tattooed. All over. The one holding his cutlass at Sash's throat had his musculature done in bright red and fine detail, from quadriceps and biceps down to the tiniest facial muscles. He looked like an anatomy chart, or like St. Bartholomew after the Armenians finished flaying him. The lady with her foot on the lens of my best holo projector was done up like a Gila monster, in black and orange pebble pattern, with each pebble carefully shaded to look raised. Black, whole-eye contacts made her eyes appropriately shiny and beady. I wondered how she felt about St. Bartholomew calling Sash "reptile." The man down by where the fountain splashed into the pool was mostly in bare skin and tattooed zippers — some of which were partly unzipped to show right lung and liver, one temporal and both frontal lobes of his brain, and selected other bits of his internal workin's, all in five colors and exquisite detail. The woman who had joined St. Bart in front of Sash was done over in spiders — big ones, little ones, hairy and smooth, they swarmed up her arms, legs, and torso (two enormous tarantulas cupped her breasts), all exact trompe l'oeil. If she'd been ticklish,

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she wouldn't have lasted two minutes. Her head was done in furry black, with pairs of iridescent patches to match the contacts she wore, the locations of the false eyes being characteristic of the *Latrodectus* genus: the Widows, black and other colors.

Sash, with Tilly now at his side and the others gathered behind, looked drab and puny in their undress coveralls and Mother Hubbards. Sash seemed unaware he was suffering by comparison; he acted as if he were trying to sell them the ship.

"Pretty fancy get-up there, cousin," he told St. Bart. "Reminds me of a guy I used to know, claimed he was part Cree, painted himself up like the Thunder God on special occasions. Real spiffy.... My name's Sash Watenabe, by the way." He stuck his hand out for a shake. St. Bart flipped it away with the tip of his cutlass. He was paying more attention to Tilly than he was to Sash. She was huddled up against her husband's side, trying to look scornful and brave at the same time.

St. Bart tossed his little shield away. It passed thru a holo date palm and clattered against the bulkhead. With his now-freed hand, he reached out and squeezed Tilly's left breast twice, firmly. "Hmmmm, lush," he gave an approving nod.

Sash's grin clunked on the floor and a look of rage replaced it. Tilly screamed "No, Sash!" and tried to hold him back, but she was much too slow. Sash kicked St. Bart dead in his tattooed crotch, doubling him over and dropping him to one knee. An instant later, Tilly screamed again, without words, as Spider Lady opened Sash from throat to navel with one effortless swipe of her impossibly sharp blade. Sash landed in a sprawled heap in front of St. Bart, and Tilly followed him to the deck, to hold him and sob.

St. Bart rose and stood hunching forward only a little. Sash had caught him square if not fair but had only been wearing ship slippers and couldn't really have done him any permanent damage. Still, it must have stung plenty, and as an affront to dignity, it was the ultimate. St. Bart looked at Gila Monster and Zippers, who'd moved up to menace the rear of our intrepid little band of adventurers, then glanced around at Spider Lady. What he read in their gaudy faces made him kick Tilly roughly away from her husband and raise his cutlass high over his head to administer the *coup de grace* to Sash.

I slammed the shutters in the ceiling. A triple fork of lightning slashed down at the aquarium. The crack of thunder resounded. It was

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the climax of "Spring Storm, Great Plains," a tape I'd been saving for a special occasion. I'd been caught napping before, but I didn't intend to let Sash get hurt any worse if I could help it.

St. Bart stopped with his cutlass at the apex of its swing, then lowered it suddenly as if afraid it would attract lightning. It was maybe three seconds before he realized what was going on. It was enough.

He picked Juan out by eye. "Correct that, slime." He flicked his cutlass up at the turmoil overhead. "Instantly, and that may live." He prodded Sash with his foot.

Juan opened his mouth and started to holler "Mazey!" then shut it again without a sound. I could have kissed him. Correction: I *would* have kissed him. He squeezed between Gila Monster and a chaise longue, slid back a panel hiding some manual controls, and touched a button. It would have speeded up the cleaning system, if it had been active, but it was the intent that mattered. I chopped Armageddon short and slid back the shutters again. The rustpile was still outside, pacing us.

"Just a timer circuit," Juan explained, as Gila Monster prodded him back into the herd. "Nothing amazeying." I hoped everyone got the message that I was in hiding.

St. Bart ignored him. He spoke to his confederates in a hissing, musical language that sounded like a snake singing. Zippers nodded, and he and Gila Monster cut Lloyd and Clarisse out of the group.

St. Bart barely glanced at them. "Dispose of the corpse." He went on talking with Spider Lady.

"He's still alive," Clarisse protested. She had knelt in the pool of Sash's blood and was holding the wound closed as best she could. "Let us put him in the hospital."

St. Bart made a gesture of dismissal which Clarisse chose to interpret as acquiescence. She sent Lloyd for a powered stretcher. Zippers followed him.

St. Bart finished his conversation with Spider Lady and turned his attention back to Juan. "Drive and navagation controls." He gave Juan a prod, which set him off toward the emergency control room. St. Bart followed, poking Juan with his cutlass every few steps to hurry him along. He must have taken etiquette lessons from Tamerlane.

Juan started explaining the controls to St. Bart just as Lloyd had wrestled a recalcitrant power stretcher to a draw and started back with it. Chyme had gotten Tilly quieted down a little and was trying to force some demon rum down her when Lloyd, Zippers

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trailing, returned with the stretcher, and she went back into heavy hysterics. Lloyd and Clarisse ignored her and gingerly loaded Sash onto the stretcher. St. Bart told Juan "Enough!" and started pulling circuit modules out of the emergency controls just as the hospital lid closed on Sash. Clarisse studied the indicator lights intently; then some of the tension left her face. St. Bart crouched next to the pile of circuit modules he'd accumulated and began methodically cracking them with his cutlass just as Chyme succeeded in getting Tilly to take a couple of swallows of brandy. Spider Lady quit tapping the aquarium with her cutlass to make the guppies dart and turned around guiltily when Clarisse, Lloyd and company returned.

"Sash?" Tilly asked miserably.

"'Tis wide as a church door, but not so deep as a well," Clarisse proclaimed. "'Tain't enough; he'll survive." She was rallying, had rallied.

Tilly could only nod numbly, clutching her glass as if praying over it.

Juan, too, seemed to have rallied when he and St. Bart returned. "Drive and navigation controls are now inoperative," he announced confidently. "We're helpless as a newborn." Which wasn't true of course, but the look on his face made it clear that anyone who mentioned me was over his head in hot water.

St. Bart had been hiss-singing to his people, probably saying the same things Juan had been. When he finished, he looked up thru the dome at the rusty scrapheap across the way and waved his free arm over his head at it. It seemed sort of a crude way to communicate, but maybe it was a cover for his secret psi powers or his surgically implanted radio.

I'd cut our hyperfield when St. Bart pulled the appropriate modules, of course, but the scene thru the dome hadn't changed. We were still in a hyperuniverse, apparently held there by the junkyard. But when St. Bart waved, things started to happen.

The limits of the hyperuniverse soured from milky white, thru sickly pink, to evil, glowing red veined with black. And we grew lighter, as we pulled nearly half a negative g. I compensated for the lost weight, then had to undo my compensation almost immediately as we were cast free and stars suddenly dusted the dome. The rustpile was gone, and we were back in normal space.

St. Bart looked up thru the dome and seemed satisfied. He flopped onto a pile of cushions and demanded: "Wine. Song." He grabbed Chyme's wrist and pulled her down beside him.

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He looked as if he were getting comfortable for a long wait, for something to rendezvous with us, or scrapheap to come back. But before that happened, we'd be long gone. I hoped.

I was sorely tempted to hop back into hyperspace in some random direction immediately after we were cut loose. But I resisted manfully. Right now, St. Bart and his band thought *they* were in control, and they were starting to let their guard down, but if we went back into hyperspace after they thought they'd destroyed the controls, there was no telling what they'd do. Besides, it was probably prudent to give scrapheap a little time to get out of sight before I tried anything tricky. So I watched the party and laid deep and devious plans.

It really wasn't too bad a party, considering. St. Bart had been rather taken with "Begin the Beguine"; so that was playing over and over while he tried to teach Chyme to dance. Chyme was cooperating, probably figuring that while St. Bart was dancing he wasn't pillaging, plundering, and raping; but she wasn't catching on too fast. The only rule seemed to be that at least one limb had to be kept on the floor most of the time. St. Bart was pretty fair at it but not a patch on Zippers and Gila Monster, who were putting on an exhibition made even more impressive by the fact that both were still clutching their cutlasses and neither had wounded himself or his partner. Or at least not severely.

We hadn't been able to provide wine; that had all vanished out the four-foot hole in our side, but we had beer, ale, and brandy. Spider Lady had consumed more ale than the other three put together, plus not inconsiderable amounts of brandy. It hadn't seemed to affect any of them much, but her least of all; she just stood there in front of the aquarium, tapping the glass and drinking. She seemed fascinated by the darting fish. Then, suddenly, she backed away from the tank, glanced at the pool, glanced at St. Bart, and sidled off down the corridor and into Clarisse's stateroom at the far end.

A little earlier, Zippers had caught hell, and the flat of St. Bart's cutlass, for peeing into the pool. Now Spider Lady was apparently in similar need and in search of a suitable site. The emergency-use-only eyes in Clarisse's stateroom showed me she'd found it.

Like everything else in *Fellow from Kent*, the toilets were special, don't-spare-the-cash designs. They flushed like five hearts, and the throats were big enough to stuff an overcoat thru without spoiling its

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press. And with good reason; a stopped-up toilet on a starship is a major disaster. In hyperspace, you *really* can't get a plumber to come out on the weekends. But nothing is perfect; so, just in case, there was an emergency unclogging procedure. The life-support system was designed to be able to deliver huge quantities of air very rapidly to any compartment, to maintain a breathable atmosphere even in the face of a fair-sized hole. And, as some bright boy pointed out, that same system could put enough high-pressure air into a cabin to shove a stoppage in a toilet or drain on down the line. Schloop, gurgle gurgle!

So, when Spider Lady plopped in place, I bolted the vacuum-tight door and gave it a try. The amount of pressure I'd managed to build up in the airlines was amazing. When I released it, the result was almost a shock wave that must have ruptured Spider Lady's eardrums and, for sure, sealed her firmly to the toilet seat. She struggled for a few seconds, then collapsed, bleeding from nose and ears, as I cranked the pressure even higher. Her cutlass slipped from her fingers as she settled more deeply. Then, just as the pressure reached design-bursting limit for the compartment, she slowly, slowly slipped out of sight, like an egg sinking into molasses. I kept the pressure up as her hands and feet vanished; then seconds later it dropped all on its own as she popped into the larger diameter main line, and air shushed along after her. I unbolted the door and cycled the toilet to refill it.

Her cutlass, lying forlornly where she'd dropped it, was an embarrassment. I'd wanted to simply make her vanish without a trace, in hopes that I might get a similar crack at another one before they really noticed she was gone and to avoid giving them a hint that I was hiding behind the curtains. It would have been extremely elegant, except for that bloomin' cutlass. Ah, well. The best laid plans of mice and me. Maybe they wouldn't find it.

But they did find it, and it worked out better than I could have hoped. After a while, St. Bart noticed that Spider Lady was missing, and apparently recalling that he was in hostile territory, despite the nonswashbuckling character of the opposition, he stopped the party by shoving his cutlass into one of the ultrafi speakers. "Begin the Beguine" ended. Zippers and Gila Monster stopped in mid writhe. St. Bart herded my people back into a clump, then stood watching them as he hiss-sang back over his shoulder at Zippers and Gila Monster. Zippers back-talked him and got the side of St. Bart's

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cutlass again, this time for sassing. That convinced him, and so he and Gila Monster, as ordered, went off looking for Spider Lady, taking Lloyd with them as a hostage.

Gila Monster prodded Lloyd along in front of her with Zippers bringing up the rear. They stuck their heads into each compartment they passed, and yelled for Spider Lady, but they stayed out in the lounge and corridors where I couldn't have gotten a crack at them even if Lloyd hadn't been along. Until they got to Clarisse's stateroom and Zippers caught sight of Spider Lady's cutlass lying on the deck, that is. Zippers and Gila Monster dashed into the compartment and snatched up the cutlass, and I thought I had them; but Lloyd, damn him, followed along behind them like a motherless duckling. Damn!

I decided I had to risk it. Zippers and Gila Monster were making a racket conversing with each other, and Lloyd had his head right next to one of my mouths. I whispered to him: "Hist! Lloyd! Get the hell out of this compartment."

"Mazey! Where have you been? I thought you were in Durance Vile." All in a regular conversational voice. Zippers and Gila Monster looked around. They thought he was talking to them. "Shut up, you idiot!" I whispered. "Get your ass back out in the corridor. Now!"

"But, what's going on," he whispered back. "Where are you? These guys have...." I know Lloyd's a topnotch astronomer, and he could take a hundred years in solitary confinement without batting his belfry, but what I wouldn't have given for a steely-eyed neurotic test pilot who could follow orders.

Gila Monster looked suspicious. I thought she might have heard me the last time. Well, in for a penny....

"LLOYD! OUT OF HERE! NOW!" I borrowed the tone from a Marine-recruiting flash, very hard sell. Lloyd practically tied his knees in knots getting outside. Gila Monster and Zippers followed him, almost as fast.

I shut the vacuum-tight door in their faces.

Lloyd was out in the corridor, and the other two were inside, banging on the door. Those doors would hold pressure forever, but the latches weren't designed to stop a determined, intelligent assault. I opened the valves that let the air inside exhaust into space. The banging stopped.

Lloyd pounded down the corridor and burst into the lounge, yelling "Mazey's back!" just as St. Bart was offering Clarisse a demonstration of the fine art of flensing. She'd made a bright remark about

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St. Bart's tattoo job, and he'd taken extreme umbrage. But he took one look at the hyperexcited Lloyd and forgot his offer to skin Clarisse alive. Instead he grabbed her wrist and pulled her to him, held her with her wrist twisted a quarter turn in a direction it wasn't supposed to turn, and his cutlass at the base of her throat. She tried to bite his thumb, but he tightened his grip on her wrist and she had to quit.

"My comrades!" he angrily demanded of Lloyd. "Where are they?" He raised his voice and hiss-sang loudly down the corridor Lloyd had just shot out of. Not even an echo answered. "So, treachery!" He thought a moment. "That one." He indicated Lloyd with a shake of his head. "Kill him, or this one dies." Even Clarisse looked surprised. Why St. Bart thought that would work, I don't know. Maybe they still had chivalry where he came from.

I'd taken us into hyperspace immediately after Lloyd did his trick with the cat and the bag. There had been nothing to lose then, and, as it turned out, St. Bart hadn't noticed anyway. Which had given me an idea. I'd closed the shutters on the dome, oh, so very quietly, while at the same time projecting the tape of "Night Sky, Lunagrad" onto the closing shutters. When I finished, you'd have thought you were still looking out into normal space, if you didn't look too carefully.

So, when St. Bart demanded Lloyd's life for Clarisse's, I answered him by bringing the most awesome dreadnaught imaginable up over the dome's horizon. I flashed the dome red and nudged the gravity (gently, I didn't want to jostle that cutlass into Clarisse's throat), as if the dreadnaught had tapped us with a beam to get our attention, and announced in my best gravelly bass: "Patrol Vessel *Flamboyant* calling *Fellow from Kent.* Your distress signal received. Heave to and receive boarders."

St. Bart, and everyone else, was staring up thru the dome at the ship which had eclipsed the Milky Way. Dead black, obviously sporting armor a dozen feet thick, bristling with turrets full of mysterious needle-nosed weapons, clamoring with the blunt, unforgiving mouths of a hundred torpedo tubes, she was as impressive as a fire storm and as menacing as a street gang. She should have been; the best special-effects men in Hollywood had labored for weeks to make her that way. She was the *Dauntless,* from "Gray Lensman," the Irwin Allen revision, not the later one.

And when St. Bart looked back down, there, in place of a holo date palm and two holo philodendrons,

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stood Charleton Heston and two bit players. Charleton had been getting awfully old by then, but done up in gray leather, truss, and plenty of make-up, he was the image of Kimball Kinnison. He, and the two bit players, lifted their laser pistols to cover St. Bart.

"Unhand that lady, you cur," said Charleton. It was the best I could come up with that would synchronize with his lip movements. He lifted his pistol to point slightly above St. Bart, and there was a quick shriek (that sounded suspiciously like the fire-disaster alarm), followed by FLASH! CRASH! above and behind St. Bart, as I catastrophically overloaded a lighting tube. The artist in me was bitterly disappointed that I couldn't arrange for a beam to pass from pistol to light, just passing over St. Bart's head. Charleton lowered his pistol to point (as nearly as I could gauge) between St. Bart's eyes. "The next one goes right between your eyes," Charleton said, slow and mean.

I'd really sort of hoped that St. Bart would actually throw away his cutlass and abjectly surrender. It would have been an incredible coup. He didn't, of course, but there, just for an instant, he wavered, and the point of his cutlass dropped away from Clarisse's throat. And she seized her opening and tried again to bite his thumb off — at the elbow. She put her heart into it this time, and she must have gotten some tendons, because her mouth came away bloody — and St. Bart's cutlass fell to the deck. St. Bart unthinkingly stooped to pick it up, two of his fingers flopping loosely as he reached, and Clarisse bit him again, this time in the upper arm. She tangled his legs up with hers and fell sideways to the floor, dragging him with her, away from the cutlass. St. Bart scrambled toward it, dragging Clarisse along, but Juan landed on him just about then and got a hold on his other arm, and half a headlock on him, too, and for a second St. Bart stopped. But he was stronger than both of them put together, and he bridged up on his head and neck and flipped Clarisse up over the top of him. Her teeth pulled out of his arm, and she rolled off to the side, out of the way. Chyme and Lloyd both tried to grab the arm St. Bart had just freed, but he had some momentum going now, and lunging forward, dragging the three of them, a few inches at a time, his outstretched hand was nearing the fallen cutlass. It was only inches away, only one more lunge to go, when Tilly snatched the cutlass up and, with her face totally expressionless, raised it high over her head and plunged it into St. Bart's straining, heaving back, precisely

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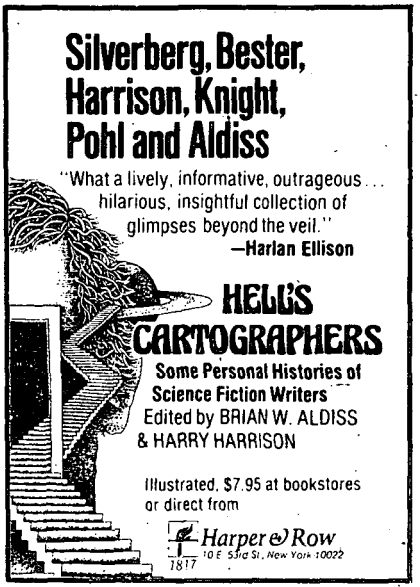
into his heart. St. Bart gave a bubbling, mournful sigh and died.

Tilly collapsed next to him, sobbing, crying with the dry, racking, can't - get - your - breath sound of someone who's been scared as badly as she can be. Juan, Chyme, and Lloyd went limp, right there on the carpet, Juan exhausted, all stunned. Clarisse picked herself from the rim of the pool, where she'd been tossed, and grinned up at my eye. Her mouth was stained red with St. Bart's blood. It seemed to suit her. "Get him, get him!?" she asked, in a high, mocking tone.

All right, so maybe I had gotten a little excited there toward the last, but I didn't remember saying anything exactly like that. Not *exactly*. I was framing a suitable reply when a traitorous circuit in my subconscious decided that the emergency was over, and all those commands I'd been storing up could be executed now. Including the Durance Vile they'd given me so many hours ago. The grate clanked over the hole, and everything went black.

They let me out as soon as they realized what had happened. Executive clemency for services rendered. My subconscious had kept up its usual fussy standard of housekeeping, and most of the mess was already cleared away. Juan told me to head back toward Tau Ceti, which was reasonable; we were much closer to there than to Earth. I was pleased. I was hoping we'd meet the junkpile again. I'd thought of a few things I wanted to try on him. And it gave me more time to try out a couple of other ideas I'd had. For instance, right now I've got them down to less than nine hours of light each "day." It's winter, you see, and the days have gotten shorter. They haven't noticed yet, but they will, and they'll throw me back in the hole. And when I get out, I've got some *real* beauties I want to try.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Regular readers know that Raylyn Moore has a way of coming up with stories absolutely unlike anything else in this field; witness this compelling tale about Miles and Beryl Hullibarger and their toy museum.

The Castle

by RAYLYN MOORE

In the small hours, after what had been a particularly strenuous day at the museum, Beryl Hullibarger felt herself being rocked gently awake. "What time?" she uttered muzzily.

"Three," Miles told her. "I couldn't sleep. Just been through a terrible nightmare, worst I ever had, maybe the worst anyone ever had."

She sat up in bed to keep herself from drifting off again, and when that seemed not to be working, switched on the lamp between the beds. "All right," she said. "Tell me."

"There I was in the museum alone, after hours, and a battering began on the front door. The big wooden bar was already across, but I crept over and secured a couple more chains and bolts — in my dream there were a lot more fastenings than there are in real life — and I was just congratulating myself I was good for a fifty-year siege when I discovered they had a fifth column. Behind every one of the showcases little heads came popping up. Well, one of these little beasts kicked me in the shins while another couple rushed for the door and unlocked it to let in the outside troops."

"*Lit*tle heads? An army of elves?"

"Alas, much worse. Children. All in costume, too. Batman. Spiderman. Mickey Mouse."

"Oh, no, Miles." She giggled somewhat reflexively, but discovered she wasn't quite so sleepy now as a moment ago.

"As soon as the door swung in, of course, the little wretches were everywhere. Smashing. Gouging. Some had baseball bats and went for all the glass in the room in a very methodical way. I could admire their tactical genius. Grudgingly, you understand. And

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then a goon squad bore down on me with the heavier weapons: jagged steel tongues pulled off little red wagons, handlebars off tricycles, sissybars off stingrays, chains off playground swings. A Superman pinned my arms while a little hand came from behind and clapped a playdough gag in my mouth. They began to bind me with jumpropes, and the last thing I saw was the pointy end of a pogostick aimed right for my eyes. Then I woke up."

She laughed again. "Poor Miles."

"Is that your only word of comfort after what I've been through?" He had put his feet out on the floor and was feeling for his slippers with blind pedipulations while at the same time he began lighting a cigarette. Deftly, he donned the slippers at the same time he snapped the lighter shut. He replaced lighter and cigarettes on the night table.

"Me too," she said. Slowly, with sleepy, hypnotic movements this time, he shook out another cigarette, lit it, and passed it across to her with a mock-gallant flourish.

Amazing, she thought, how really splendid Miles could look, even at this hour and after an enervating dream. With his regular features, his transparent, direct gaze, he might be an actor or a celebrated athlete (mountain climber, perhaps, because of the sun-bleached hair, the even tan), instead of a quietly devoted, forty-year-old husband.

Most of all, though — and she'd thought of this often before — Miles reminded Beryl of all the boys from her school days who in her own judgment had seemed far too attractive to be interested in her. And then each time one of them *had* shown her some small attention, she had been too startled and unbelieving to respond, lapsing to her own dismay into shy speechlessness. Even with Miles, even as a twice-wed woman of thirty-eight, she still occasionally felt a twinge of this remembered shyness.

She broke the silence which had settled between them. "It's small wonder you had a dream like that after yesterday. Weren't they ghastly yesterday?"

"The worst I've ever seen. After that fourth-grade class came through, I discovered the little monsters had left finger smudges on every case, and one of them stole the scale figure out of the yard of the eighteen-fifty dollhouse."

It was a relief to join in his lament. "Another one knocked over the enameled rabbit that swallows the beanbag. I knew I shouldn't have left it out. And some little darling pulled a lot of hair off the hide-covered rockinghorse, the one that's patchy anyway."

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Miles dabbed out his cigarette half smoked and kicked off his slippers. He lay down again. He pulled the blankets up to his chin and sighed deeply.

"But then," she summarized in a lighter tone, "it's what we're in business for, isn't it? To show antique toys. And, after all, they're only children."

When he didn't answer, she looked sharply in his direction. Miles lay supine, eyes closed, breathing with untroubled regularity. While she, on the contrary, had never felt more thoroughly awake. "Impossible man," she said fondly and then groaned — but inaudibly, so as not to wake him — as she came to a full realization of her plight. Once brought to full consciousness at an untimely hour, especially toward morning, she was never quite able to burrow back into sleep, like Miles.

So what now? Well, she could read. But unfortunately her only unfinished library book had turned inordinately dull in the middle, an overwritten, self-pitying harangue about people whose lives she considered not nearly so interesting as her own and Miles's.

It was in fact curious, she thought, how really absorbing her life had become, partly by accident, partly by design. (But then isn't everyone's life, fortunate or not, built by accident and design?) Five years had passed since she and Miles had moved to Monterey. Shortly before that, an elderly second cousin had died, leaving Beryl a doll collection, mostly French chinaheads and frozen charlottes. Beryl had tucked the bequest away without too much thought, but the dolls had come to light again during the moving.

"Wherever did these little dears come from?" Miles had wanted to know. She told him. "But they mustn't be hidden. We must have them out." And he had bought a book on antique toys and established the approximate dates of manufacture for each of the dolls ("date of birth," he called them whimsically), labeled them neatly, and then began reading aloud to her about the kinds of toys which had appeared in various parts of the world during various historical epochs. Next he brought home catalogues and hobby magazines, showed her there was a not inconsiderable underground of men and women who bought and sold antique toys, lovingly restored them, traveled thousands of miles to view one another's collections.

"It's every bit as good as joining Pixies Anonymous," Miles declared. And from that moment, it seemed, Beryl had found herself inundated with dolls and dollhouses, dollcarriages, rocking-horses, tops, jacks-in-the-box,

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blackamoor coin banks (enough to set civil rights back three hundred years, she marveled), wooden soldiers, lead soldiers, toy cannon (even a miniature guillotine; it is a misapprehension that only twentieth-century toymakers have been destruction-minded), beanbag games and backgammon sets.

And when the eighteen-thirty adobe house had been listed for sale, it had seemed perfect for them and their new preoccupation. Miles had been ecstatic. "It looks like the depot in a period Western, the set where the mail clerk runs in all sweaty and sooty and says, 'Them varmints just robbed the three-fifteen express a ma-ahl down the track, shot the fireman and cut open all the mail sacks.'"

So had she been ecstatic, but for a different reason. "But do you know that under that awful puce paint, it's the real thing? The walls are over three feet thick and the hardware is original. Doorlatches, trivets, the crane in the fireplace. Not to speak of the literary history."

"Literary history?"

"The agent told me there's a local rumor that while Stevenson was officially living in Monterey at another address, he was renting this house too, under an assumed name, for trysts with Mrs. Osborne."

"Bully," said Miles. "We can tie in *Kidnapped,* and *Treasure Island.* Rumor or not, it'll give us the cachet we'll need to call the place 'A Child's Garden.'"

"Well...I don't know if that would be exactly cricket, Miles, since the time he spent here — *if* he spent time here — didn't exactly go into writing children's literature."

"Still, he was the same man who did the writing, wasn't he? Some of the magic will have rubbed off. I'll bet anything the place is enchanted."

"And if not enchanted, at least enchanting," she pointed out.

They moved the best of their burgeoning collection into the long front room, which was the authentic portion of the house. Much of the rest of the rambling structure, roofed in red Spanish tile, was restoration or addition. Into it they moved their household and the broken things — salvaged from extinction after many a trip to attics, barns and antique auctions — that were now always standing around demanding their attention.

The carrousel horses alone took up plenty of space as they stood rather wistfully waiting, each in a different stage of arrested deterioration, dappled paint flaked away, reins shredded, peering at the drastically changed world from one eye, or eternally pricking up a single remaining ear.

At its rear boundary, the

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property slid precipitously into a ravine lush with pines and dwarf liveoaks. The gully itself was a city easement, permanent buffer against possible encroachment by neighbors, the nearest of which were comfortably far off across the canyon.

The only signal of their existence, in fact, was a faint but steady daytime concert of children's voices floating from an invisible backyard, which was evidently exactly opposite the Hullibarger's kitchen windows. It was not unpleasant, Beryl thought, that muted orchestration of squeals and shouts, murmurs, passing spates of laughter and tears.

And almost as soon as they were settled, Miles made plans for the castle. "It's the perfect setting. A fort here would command a view of the floor of the canyon and any invading army that might attack from there. One person could hold off a dozen platoons, a battalion."

"An invading army? But I've never seen anyone in the ravine but a few little boys with slingshots."

"Exactly. That's it. Think how surprised they'll be to glance up here and discover towers and flags, a bolt from a crossbow lobbing out of a castellated window."

"You're quite mad, you know?" she said indulgently.

"Quite," he cheerfully agreed.

"There's an old wives' tale that all American men are really little boys in wolf's clothing," Beryl said, and bit her tongue hard. She had meant only to respond to Miles's banter, but the speech was quite tactless under the circumstances.

Fortunately he didn't seem to notice. "Do you believe that?" he asked slyly.

"I believe that not all men are classifiable," she said carefully, and smiled at him, handing over her weak compliment like a peace offering. "Some are so original they don't fit into any category at all."

The fortress was to be six feet across the front and roofless (so Miles might climb in easily), with ramparts wide enough to support a lookout pacing off a watch there. It took a long time to accumulate enough rocks of uniform size and color. Miles bought a trowel, a cement trough, hoe, shovel, and wheelbarrow, and worked at the castle when they weren't too busy with the other projects.

But for a while the other affairs were annoyingly time-consuming. Right off, there was the unpleasantness with the city over the question of the Hullibargers' having unwittingly violated the zoning code by opening a "business" in a neighborhood designated residential-only, and the long struggle to acquire a variance for the toy museum as a "cultural institution."

They had some opposition even

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to that. (Miles was strangely hurt. "I can't imagine who or why; we have no enemies.") However, in the end the question was settled in their favor. Sometimes it seemed to Beryl that from then on they'd been more or less forced to continue their "Child's Garden" by being made to feel an obligation to make use of their hard-won variance.

Not that they were so very businesslike about it. There was one discreet sign on their blue front gate giving the name of the place and the hours the museum would be open. The latter information wasn't even dependable.

Mostly the visitors were Brownie troops, families, or fellow doll and toy collectors. And the visits in most cases were by appointment. If someone did drop in casually, all to the good. They were graciously shown around. But the multitudes were never of such proportions that Miles and Beryl didn't know, usually exactly, who had pilfered the milkglass eggs from under the china hen, and the taw from the century-old marble collection.

Well-dressed elderly ladies, they learned, often pilfered, but discriminately. Children stole more whimsically, often lifting things from one place and forgetfully abandoning them elsewhere in the room before they left.

But it was four o'clock now, and Beryl found herself still sitting in her nightgown, hugging her knees, the light still on, Miles still sleeping deeply. She was drowsy enough to have lost track of the time during her reverie, but too wakeful still to settle down again. This is ridiculous, she thought. If I'm not going back to sleep, I should *do* something.

Breakfast, that was it. She would take a leisurely bath and then make something interesting for breakfast. A surprise. Scones, she decided, getting into robe and slippers. Today it was her turn anyway, and she would serve the scones with fresh strawberries and yogurt. Miles had done a soufflé yesterday.

It was a matter of pride to her that not once in their marriage had Miles and she been so unimaginatively provisioned that they had had to begin a day with the eggs of fowl. Sometimes it would be smoked salmon or pastrami, buttered roe in season, or spiced lamb kidneys browned with herbs.

During her decade of marriage to Tom, she had done all the cooking, but that was a breeze, since Tom's unparticular taste ran to barbecued chicken and charcoaled steak. And for breakfast, unfailingly, three steam-basted eggs with three strips of bacon on the side and three slices of buttered toast.

A predictable man, Tom, one

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who could not possibly want to construct a castle on the wall of a ravine, or wake his wife in the middle of night to tell her some idiotic dream, or plunge their joint capital into such a romantic and joyfully precarious business venture as a toy museum.

To some of Beryl's former friends, however, Tom's essential dullness had seemed insufficient reason for her to desert and run off with Miles Hullibarger. She could have explained to them, had she been the sort of person to discuss private motives with friends, that her abrupt escape was the only possible way to leave Tom, that the very idea of sitting down and discussing divorce with him was unthinkable, leading, as it certainly would have, to a long forensic contest which she would have been doomed from the start to lose. For Tom's utterly logical mind, his solid, matter-of-fact reasoning, was ever invincible (and extremely valuable, it was said, to the company for which he worked).

So she and Miles had become something of a scandal in the small town they had left, while Tom had come off rather handsomely as far as public opinion went. Less than six weeks after the divorce he had wed his secretary and now they had two children. There had been no children during Beryl's marriage to Tom, and of course none since she'd been with Miles.

Nor would there ever be. Miles had been honest with her. The only thing was, his honesty on this point had surfaced a bit late, *after* she had taken the plunge, burned her bridges. Not that she hadn't already known. How could she not? And yet everything had moved so fast at the time, there had been no moment for decision. She had felt catapulted by the force of whimsy, impulse. That was the way things were for anyone associated with Miles, of course. And she had never really regretted anything.

"Darling, I would have told you, but I was so afraid of losing you."

"Don't be absurd. I'm not a romantic young girl any more, Miles. It doesn't matter."

"It's probably just a temporary thing. I'm sure it is. If you'd be patient —"

"Of course."

"And even if it isn't temporary, well, then there are other things in life, as you must have heard. Wonderful things. We can build a life together."

And they had. It had been a glorious new beginning for her, of the sort most people only dream about. At thirty-eight she felt younger than she had at twenty-four. Her weight went down, even her dimensions seemed smaller. She could wear a size twelve for the

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first time since college. And all their problems were little ones. Like what had happened to the castle....

The first time the children had attacked the castle was before it was quite finished. Miles had left it late one afternoon with the mortar wet and returned in the morning to find the stones prized out of place. It looked as if a heavy pinch bar had been used. "I can scarcely believe it was children," Beryl had said. "Think of the strength it must have taken."

"Which is why I'm sure it *was* children," Miles insisted. "They're all just bubbling over with misdirected energy, aren't they? And if they're determined enough, they can do anything." He began gathering the stones and knocking off the mortar. Beryl helped him, discovering that the same mortar which slides off surfaces in the most maddening way during building, clings stubbornly on stones which must be cleaned and reused.

The next time, the vandals had somehow sheared off the towers of the completed citadel, and once they had blasted a hole under the front wall with some explosive, presumably dynamite, though it didn't make sense that children should have access to dynamite. (The Hullibargers had been out the evening it happened, and so had heard no sound.)

Each time Miles repaired the damage. They had never seen the enemy, and Beryl had early discarded the notion that the culprits could possibly be the children across the ravine. Their voices seemed far too young, even considering that Miles spent several years perfecting his redoubt, during which time, of course, the neighboring children would have grown older, and stronger.

When she came back into the bedroom at seven, he was sitting up reading. She spoke to the pristine dustjacket of his new book. "Scones. And everything's ready but the coffee."

He pulled her down beside him on the bed, kissed her forehead tenderly — an early-morning kiss. "I'll make the coffee," he offered.

"Naturally I was hoping you would. I should know better than to spoil you with blandishments, but you really are a jewel, truly a paradigm of a husband. Sometimes I think I don't deserve you."

"Oh? Then you don't think one gets what one deserves?"

"Of course not. Only children believe that, and even they have to give it up all too soon, in the face of the overwhelming contrary evidence."

"I have news. I'm not sure *I* don't believe it." He gave her a playful shove. "But what are we, going to lounge around discussing while the scones wilt? And on

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second thought, *ma petite,* if you make the coffee, I could shower first."

"Ah, so your promises are just rhetoric. Maybe I was wrong. Maybe you're just a garden-variety husband after all."

"Nonsense. We both know better. But I'll at least be sporting about it. We can flip a shilling. Surely we must have a shilling around somehwere, don't we? Since we're the couple who has everything?"

In the end she ground the coffee in the antique mill (a prize uncovered on one of their foraging expeditions), and he brewed it, an operation which, like some others connected with food preparation, usually came out better in his hands. Small wonder. She had had to learn from him that the only way to make coffee is to steep a powdery grind in a stone crock with a tight cover (this after years of percolating an inferior brew for Tom's less discriminating palate).

They lingered over their cups, trading sections of the *Chronicle.* Afterward she dressed in the costume she had long since decided upon as most suitable for her new, do-as-you-please life: white knit shirt worn with a brightly printed full cotton skirt. Or sometimes she wore shifts or abas in equally gay colors. She was simply not a woman for trousers and it had nothing to do with her shape. She had always liked full skirts and gay colors, had simply never got enough of "pretty" dresses in childhood.

The day turned golden and fragrant, like new bread. Beryl opened the muslin draperies in the museum and slowly polished the cases with her featherduster and a swatch of clean cheesecloth.

At midmorning the telephone rang in the back of the house where Miles was puttering, and after a moment she heard him say, "But how good of you to think of us. And of course we'd love to. I'm sure we have nothing planned for then."

She waited duster poised over the case where the china dolls lay, on the verge of pique that Miles seemed to be promising away one of their precious evenings without consulting her. But on the other hand, she reminded herself quickly, this was no longer the old time, when she had grudged every hour spent in the company of the awful bores who had been Tom's business associates.

The people she and Miles knew now belonged to that special race which inhabits the older, nonindustrial towns of California. Either they were interesting, or the setting made them seem so. And that, Beryl told herself practically, amounted to the same thing.

She looked down now into the case against which she was resting

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her arms. Though she had arranged the pale china flesh of the dolls against rich crimson velvet, for cheer, the miniature scene never failed to remind her of a morgue full of rigid small bodies.

Had little girls really cherished these sharp-featured, cold, porcelain offspring, less yielding even than the bisque dolls which came later? Loved and dressed them? Crooned to them and scolded, and tucked them into cradles? And would there be a future in which Barbie and Ken and Midge and the rest of that spritely crowd would lie in some museum case, having perished together beneath the juggernaut of changing tastes?

It was still, even after all the years had passed, a strange thing to her how easily she could think of childhood in the abstract, could even remember details of the childhoods of other people she had known. Yet when she thought of her own, there was almost no recall. A blank.

On a family vacation when she was seven, her mother and a younger sister had died in a boating accident on a lake. All the other memories of things before and after — the toys she herself had played with, her friends, the birthday parties — had lost form and substance in direct relation to their proximity to the double tragedy. Christmas especially. Her father, though by nature neither a morose man nor a morbid one, had nevertheless been unable to condone the celebration in his home of any holidays which one way or another would be certain to invoke visions of happier times.

He had eventually remarried. Beryl and her stepmother had been very friendly. But this was later, in a period belonging more to adolescence. And somehow it all lent even more credence to her conviction that her life hadn't really begun until she met Miles.

She heard him approaching through the hall with unhurried, careless footsteps, as if there was nothing to rush for or worry over. And indeed it seemed there was not. A day maid came three times a week to clear away the inevitable clutter and do any accumulating laundry. They did not have to depend on their "Child's Garden" for their livelihood, or even on the buying and selling of toys. Their time belonged to themselves.

"Who was on the telephone?"

"Gladys Schofield. I accepted for her Sunday buffet."

"But, darling, Sunday evening is when the two little old ladies from the Piney Grove Rest Home are coming to the museum. They made an appointment weeks ago. They're being brought by the son of one of them, and it's the only time he can get here."

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Miles struck his forehead with one palm in an exaggerated gesture. "A hundred curses on my muddled head," he swore. "I clean forgot about the two little old ladies from the Piney Grove Rest Home. But we can't disappoint Gladys. We'll have to arrange another time for the ladies."

Beryl called the Piney Grove Rest Home, and after a great deal of apologizing, and negotiating, and waiting while the son was called, and being called back, she had a new date with the ladies. The one with whom she did the negotiating seemed disappointed, but bore up well, and spoke in a chirrupy voice, reassuring Beryl that she understood, that things are always coming up over which we have no control, and that it's enough to expect of a person just to do the best he can.

At noon Miles came in from the ravine to report the castle was intact. "What a draggy day," he said. "Time must have stopped. Or maybe it's even flowing backwards."

"*Quien sabe?*" she echoed absently, beginning to toss a crisp salad aglow with color. "What kind of dressing do you fancy?"

They had lunch in the patio, stretching their time in the sun until nearly two, when Miles fell asleep in the chaise longue and Beryl hurried in to answer the visitors' bell.

Waiting at the blue gate were a couple with a little girl, and a grandmother. Beryl shepherded them among the cases, explaining cursorily, waiting politely for their questions. But there weren't any questions. Only the grandmother seemed really to look beyond the glass, pausing here and there to cluck in remembrance. At length she turned to Beryl and smiled. "It's all here, of course," she said. "But one can't get through to it."

"Oh, but I'll be glad to unlock the case," Beryl offered cordially. "We have to keep things tucked away behind glass because of the children —"

"No, no. Don't bother. I didn't mean that. It's more than a layer of glass that I meant. It's time that lies between. As for the children, they want to get at the toys so they can assert their right to them over yours. They have more of a claim on them than we have, you see. But then I talk too much, don't I? I've been told often enough that I talk too much."

"Not at all."

"I guess I really meant to say that one can't live in the past, can one?"

Beryl smiled back. "I don't know about that." She made an inclusive gesture to indicate all the things the room contained. "I seem to be living in the past, and I wouldn't trade it for anything."

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"Well," the grandmother allowed, "perhaps you're luckier than most."

"I am that," Beryl agreed.

At four she closed the draperies and bolted the heavy outside door — the one that had figured so prominently in Miles's silly dream — and went to find her husband, who was reverently sandpapering the flank of a horse. "I'm almost sure this one is pearwood," he told her as she sank down beside him, the bright skirt settling around her on the floor like a shriveling blossom. "Hasn't the day gone slowly? Or did I say that before?"

"Yes, Miles. It really has."

Beryl watched his hands moving against the wood. They were small hands for a man, but they were well-made, blunt-fingered, beautiful. He put down the sanding block and lit cigarettes for them both. "What'll we do now?"

"We could play musical music."

"So we could! How jolly of you to have suggested it. Reminds me that I have a surprise."

"You bought a new record?"

"Bet you can't guess what it is, though."

They left everything where it was, the sawdust still all over the floor, the cap of the paint remover, a paint brush tossed down without being put into turpentine, and went into the large rear room where the stereo was.

He rummaged through the things on the coffeetable — fish glue for repair of the horses and doll furniture, circulars, catalogues, a doll's flaxen wig, a cribbage board with pegs — and came up with a flat package.

There was a prolonged, papery explosion in the room as he freed it from the store wrapper, the sleeve, and finally the glassine envelope. He placed it carefully on the turntable. "Now guess," he ordered her, as the sound swelled. "Brahms? Buxtehude? Beethoven? Have you ever noticed that when it's unidentifiable and could be any of several composers, it always turns out to be Schubert?"

Before meeting Miles, Beryl remembered, she had listened mostly to Mozart and Bach, and Landowski playing Scarlatti on the harpsichord. An odd fancy struck her now, an uncertainty over whether Miles had enlarged her musical horizons or diminished them. She'd never thought of it in just this way before. But before she could either certify the notion or dismiss it, he was pressing her for attention. "Well, then, are you going to guess Schubert, or are you afraid of a trick?"

Beryl let another minute of sound pass and then said: "Clementi."

Miles immediately strode to the tuner and snapped the switch. The

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music strangled on a reverberating chord. "You cheated," he said flatly. "You peeked."

"How could I have peeked? The thing was all done up the way it was when you brought it in from the store." A curious suspicion fretted her. "You're not really angry, are you?"

"Of course not, silly. I turned it off because I suddenly got tired of it, didn't you? It wasn't as good as I remembered." He came over and dropped a kiss on her hair as she sat on a low hassock. "And, anyhow, guessing games are no fun when you play with someone who knows all the answers."

They sometimes walked in the evenings. When it was time, Beryl got a cardigan from the bedroom and Miles put on his pullover and red watchcap. They set off down the ravine, moving over the springy, thick layer of pine needles and liveoak leaves. They took hands, and when the canyon leveled out, they ran part of the way.

After three-quarters of a mile they were at the foot of the long sweep of falling ground in sight of the bay. They couldn't decide whether to walk on to the wharf to buy lobster or return upcanyon to dress and then eat out. But as they moved out of the sheltering walls of their ravine, Beryl felt the biting chill of incoming fog. Below them the bay showed neither whitecaps nor foam along the shore, but undulated, pulsating with fast swells which never broke, a living green lung laboring to breathe.

"I'm very cold," she admitted in a small voice, hoping it didn't sound too chicken. "Let's not walk all the way to the wharf."

Without a word he turned back into the canyon and she followed. It seemed he was resentful and she was sorry she hadn't lied and said she was warm enough. Not that he had inquired. But she should, then, have said nothing at all.

They were nearly at the edge of their own property and starting up the wall of the gully when it became plain the castle was occupied. The tassel of a red watchcap rose from the ramparts with excruciating slowness. From beneath the red wool a pair of fierce brown eyes fixed on Beryl's eyes. There were two of them, dressed alike in pullovers and the knit caps. Twins, apparently. No older than about eight.

"Get out of there," Miles ordered bruskly.

The boys didn't budge. "Who're you?" one of them demanded.

"It's more to the point who *you* are, isn't it? Whose property do you think this is?"

"We found this castle and it's ours," the boy said flatly.

Beryl became aware of two things: Miles was furious, really

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furious, his face gone suddenly sanguine under the tan; and he was mentally connecting these children with the past devastations, which was patently ridiculous. More likely these were the children whose voices they so often heard.

She had not said anything, nor had the second boy, and to try to soften things, she smiled at the silent one now, but his hard little eyes remained defiant and wary. She didn't blame him for not smiling back, understanding that to respond to her would be to betray his brother, his comrade-in-arms.

"You may have found it," Miles was meanwhile blustering, "but *I* built it."

The boy was obviously incredulous. "But this ain't even your propitty. My dad says all this here belongs to the city." He indicated the sweep of slanted land.

Beryl wanted to laugh. He might be right about that, she thought. They hadn't ever seen any bench marks showing the exact extent of their land. Yet she couldn't risk laughter in the presence of Miles's very real anger. It occurred to her that until now she had never seen Miles with children who were not safely escorted by their elders — teachers or scout leaders, if not parents and grandparents. When children misbehaved at the museum, in the end there was always some adult about to hurry them away before anything really serious could occur.

Miles saw the rock coming before she did. "Look out!" he shouted and pulled her roughly to one side. But the missile, thrown short, thudded onto the leaf cover a few yards in front of where they stood, and rolled to rest at Miles's feet. Not one of the building rocks, a smaller one, but still heavy for a child to loft easily.

The next thing she knew Miles had leaned over, picked up the rock. She couldn't believe at first that he would do what he seemed to be doing, and the shock made her voice stick in her throat, then emerge at last in a kind of startled croak. "Miles, for goodness' sake!"

Perhaps it was this strange quality of voice that made him stop and look at her. He seemed to recover himself, even smiled grimly as he dropped the stone and it bounced away down the slope.

But of course the thing wasn't settled yet. Up at the castle, behind which stood the Child's Garden, the twin who was the spokesman again put his head over the rampart and hurled down the challenge. "We'll fight you for it," he said.

"Agreed," Miles said behind her. "But before I start up the hill, you two have to come out from behind the wall with nothing in your hands."

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"Fair enough," said the boy.

Sheer amazement cut off her voice of protest this time, so she couldn't get out the words that would again stop Miles in his tracks. Or perhaps she couldn't have stopped him this time in any case. He plunged up the slope ready for battle, and the two emerged from behind the stone kremlin to meet him as agreed. For a long time she remained frozen near the bottom of the hill, watching what was happening simply because she couldn't make herself stop watching. It went on for a long time. They fought desperately, as if for their lives, kicking, gouging, smashing.

And after a while she had to admit that of the three little boys, all of a size, struggling fiercely on the leaf-covered slope, she could no longer tell, through the lowering dusk, which was Miles.

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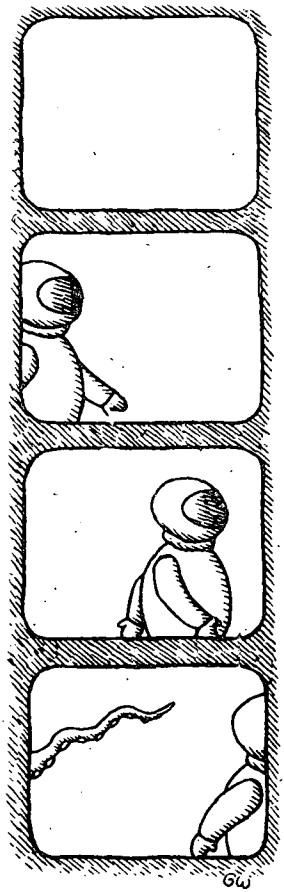
THINGS TO COME

Regular readers will know that a feature of this column through the years has been a "Things to come" postscript, where I make note of productions in the works — or rumored to be in the works, as it often turns out (the movie industry being prone to announce things that are sometimes only an itch in the producer's wallet). Never did I think that there would come a point when I would be forced to devote a whole column to things to come, but as I've been intimating for some months now, the dam is about to bust (my Ouija board typer just wrote "damn" for dam, which may be all too true), and you might be interested in what *may be* (see cautionary note above) looming ahead for your screens.

With comments, of course — I can't resist the comments. Some of my more vitriolic mail has been occasioned by my (usually gloomy) remarks about upcoming films, of the "who - are - you - to - prejudge - these - potentially - superb - works?" type. For example, a particularly nasty one came some months back because I had been briefly snide about an Irwin Allen production being made for TV called *The Time Travelers.*" Well, it aired this month and was a bloody bore up to the including the

BAIRD SEARLES

Films



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Chicago fire. Don Ameche and Alice Faye did it much better.

My point is not a simple "I told you so." It is that critics — *real* critics — are such because they have knowledge and a feel for the field they are talking about and can communicate those qualities accurately and interestingly. That sense of quality can and does extend to works in the making, particularly in an area that has scored so badly as the s/f and fantasy film.

Enough of the present... what's in the future?

First off, *from the field.* This is important to me, since if the script is taken from a known work, there's a chance it won't be that sort of fake stuff outsiders (writers *and* filmmakers) think science fiction is.

From the granddaddy of us all, Edgar Rice Burroughs, two-count-'em-two; apparently *The Land That Time Forgot* was a success at the box office. One is the sequel to that, *The People That Time Forgot,* with more doughy dinosaurs presumably. The other really calls for lots of luck; it is *At the Earth's Core.* The upward-turning horizon of Pellucidar may present the biggest special effects problem ever encountered; so far as I know, it's yet to be satisfactorily portrayed in a drawing, much less a movie.

Zelazny's *Damnation Alley* will be in production by the time this is printed. While I remember the novel as exciting if lacking that particular Zelazny glamor, I have a feeling the film will reduce it to an overgrown tank and a lot of desert.

Dune is still plugging away under Jodorowsky's direction; it is rumored to have gained and lost several special effects people already. Orson Welles will be in it, which considering some of the things he has descended to, is no guarantee of quality.

Childhood's End is supposedly still in the works, but it has been "in the works" for so long that I don't really believe it.

There are *three* Thongor films (based on four of Lin Carter's novels; don't ask *me*) in simultaneous production, from something called "Sword and Sorcery Productions" (which is at least calling a spade a spade). These are budgeted well enough to be promising, but I wish they'd have gone to the original — Conan, of course — rather than a derivitive work.

The Martian Chronicles (another project long talked about) may be a film or a TV series.

And, of course, the *Star Trek* film (for the record, I consider ST true s/f, probably the only *true* s!f series to come from TV). As of this writing, *still* no script or special effects people. If they don't watch out, the ST fad will be over by the time they get it out (projected summer '77).

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And now for the *bad* news. The *Lord of the Rings* has been turned over by MGM to Ralph (*Fritz, the Cat*) Bakshi to be done as combined live action and animation. *Fritz, the Hobbit?*

And, oh yes, Bester's *The Demolished Man,* Koontz' *Demon Seed,* Spinrad's *Bug Jack Barron,* Christopher's *Cloud On Silver,* and Wells *The Food of the Gods.*

From other sources, of interest one way or another:

The two projected King Kong films have been reduced to one, which doesn't make me only half as dubious about it. The original is so good, and so *of its period;* any updating is bound to be ridiculous.

There's going to be another *When Worlds Collide.* Why?

For Roy Harryhausen fans, another Sinbad film: *Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger.*

A sequel to *Westworld* called *Futureworld.* Z-z-z-z-z.

A big budget film from Disney, *Space Probe,* which promises to be in advance of the usual Disney s/f effort (i.e. flubber).

Watership Down, animated.

Production began on twenty four *more* episodes of *Space 1949* — excuse me — *1999* in January. Now, there is fake s/f, if you want an example.

Harlan Ellison is writing a TV feature called *Dark Destroyer* for Dan (*Dark Shadows*) Curtis Productions. Knowing both those volatile gentlemen, I'd give a lot to be in on *those* story conferences.

Also: *Cold War in a Country Garden;* a very large-budgeted *Superman; The Micronauts; The Lupezoids* (?); *Cybernia; Wheelworld* (nice title); *War Wizards* (Bakshi again); *The Ultimate Warrior* (New York in anarchy); *Alas, Babylon; Spermula; Five Billion and Six; The Super-Inframan* (in something called "Stereophonic Infrasound" — bats can hear it); and *Brave New World.*

And, of course, George Lukas's *Star Wars,* which I mentioned last month, and which at this point still seems the most promising of the lot.

In all fairness, I must admit that most of the research for this glimpse into the future was done by a toiler in the Hollywood vineyards who generously passed on the fruits of his labor to me, and a fine job he did, too. Thanks, Chuck.

Small-screen-dept..... The highlight of this month's TV viewing was, of all things, a commercial. It featured a Dr. Asimov, described in little letters under his chin as a "science writer." He was telling us about radial tires and I was so intrigued that I almost went out and bought some. Luckily, I remembered in time that I didn't own a car.

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This is one of a series of stories by Michael Coney that share the same fascinating background — a place known as The Peninsula — and are narrated by slithe farmer Joe Sagar.

The Cinderella Machine

by MICHAEL G. CONEY

Once I loved a girl named Joanne, but I don't think she loved me. I haven't heard of her since she left the State Prison last October after serving a period under Bondage, making a certain sacrifice, and thereby obtaining her release. Now she is gone from the Peninsula, gone out of my life, leaving nothing but the echo of her quiet personality in my mind — and something else, a more tangible reminder ....

I was thinking of Joanne as I stood in the cockpit of Carioca Jones' hydrofoil *Flambuoyant*, watching the twin wakes hissing astern and hearing the endless prattle of her voice above the whine of the turbines. I'd been reminded of Joanne by the sight of Carioca's hands, white and smooth beside mine as they gripped the rail. Recently she had taken to wearing long gloves, but today the skin was bare, and I could see the thin pale lines around her wrists — the only physical reminder of the grafts.

As the hydrofoil skipped through the Strait on that bright September afternoon, I have no doubt many of the nearby yachtsmen were envying me as they caught sight of my companion with her perfectly preserved figure, wearing long mauve pants and nothing else except midnight hair trailing thickly across her breasts. Only her face gave her away: the lines of dissipation around the mouth, the wrinkled flesh of the neck, the hard bright black eyes with the crow's-feet radiating. I wouldn't like to guess her real age, but Carioca Jones, the former 3-V star, is not old, not yet.

"I've rented the Princess Louise for a whole week in September," she was saying. "I want this to be *good*, Joe. The Carioca Jones Revival Season," she murmured dreamily. "Can you imagine it? All

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my old movies, all shown again with the very best equipment, not just a couple of *piddling* little 3-V projectors in the corner of somebody's *dreary* living room. This will be onstage, and people will see me as I really am!"

I watched a sling-glider rise into the sky and soar away across the Strait, bright yellow in the September sun. "Those movies were made some time ago, Carioca," I said carefully. She was not a woman to accept that years pass.

"*Dear* Joe, you were always the *tactless* one," she trilled girlishly. "I suppose you're worried I might appear *naked* onstage in person. No, all you need to concern yourself with is the gloves I want you to make for me. Leave the rest to me, darling."

"Do you think many people will pay to see old movies?" I persisted.

"My *dear*, you don't understand the psychology. They'll pay to be seen in the company of the people to whom I send complimentary tickets. It's a cultural event, Joe — and we have few enough of those nowadays. Absolutely *everybody* who considers themselves *anybody* must be seen at a cultural event."

"This is the Peninsula, Carioca. Not one of your big cities. I'm not sure there's enough of the right, uh, type here." In fact there are few examples of the culture hound on the Peninsula, which is populated mainly by phonies and fun lovers. I could only think of Miranda Marshbanks, the elegant owner of Pacific Kennels, a haven for sick or temporarily homeless pets. Not long ago there had been an unfortunate incident at the kennels, which had resulted in the spectacular death of Carioca's land-shark Wilberforce during a feeding frenzy. Since Carioca held Miss Marshbanks responsible for the affair, and had said so, publicly and repeatedly, I doubted that the woman would attend the Revival Season.

"Joe Sagar, you have no *idea*," she caroled indulgently. "I know. I've *traveled*. I've always found that one has merely to turn a stone, and the right type will pop up, I mean *literally*. For instance, the members of the Foes of Bondage will attend, to a woman."

"Oh, yes, the Foes. How are they?" The Foes of Bondage is a society devoted to expressing its indignation over the current penal laws. Led by Carioca Jones, they picket the State Penitentiary and demand reforms of the rules governing the hiring of State Prisoners, the principle of Bondage, and the very existence of the Ambulatory Organ Pool.

"The Foes are extremely active," said Carioca, adopting her platform voice unconsciously.

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"During the Revival Season we shall march on the pen and *insist* that the Ambulatory Organ Pool be disbanded and those *wretched* people be allowed to resume normal lives as State Prisoners without the dreadful fear that, at any moment, a part of their body could be *hacked* from them and used as a *spare part* for a Freeman." She watched as a sling-glider made an untidy landing nearby, spray flying. "You see that *maniac* over there? Just because he wants to risk his life for fun, why should he be entitled to *demand* replacements for his body when he smashes himself up? Tell me that, Joe!"

"Take it easy, Carioca. I don't like the pool either."

"Oh? But you hire prisoners like *pack animals* and you even have your own Bonded man as a *slave*."

"I thought we'd agreed not to talk about that," I said ....

The afternoon had turned to chill early evening as we made our way towards Carioca's mooring at Deep Cove. I helped her onto the landing stage and dutifully returned to the boat for the unwieldy Nag, her moray eel. Nag is a normally comatose beast and very little trouble — a welcome change from the unpredictable, defunct Wilberforce. I placed the fish on the landing stage, and he undulated slowly after Carioca like an evil black snake, the oxygenator pulsing near his gills. He wore a jeweled collar; Carioca always dresses her pets well.

The following morning I made the usual rounds of my small farm at the water's edge. I am a slithe farmer by trade and operate a small workshop where the slitheskins are made up into various items of clothing and decoration, renting female State Prisoners as my labor force. Despite the low wages, the operation is marginal, and I need my regular customers like Carioca — which was why I had accepted her invitation for an afternoon's cruise on *Flambuoyant*. I'd been hoping there might be a deal in the offing, and there was. She wanted a new pair of slitheskin gloves for her big opening night.

Despite Carioca's innuendos, I hire State Prisoners because I believe the pen ought to be self-supporting and I resent the idea of prisoners sitting on their asses being kept by the rest of us. I even have a Bonded man, my foreman Dave Froehlich, who has legally undertaken to obey my every whim, twenty-four hours a day, in return for a one-third remission of sentence. I never take advantage of him — although some people have peculiar whims ....

Once I loved a girl named

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Joanne, who had beautiful hands. She was a State Prisoner and Carioca Jones' Bonded girl — in the days before Carioca conveniently decided Bondage was Evil.

Carioca envied Joanne's hands.

"Following the furor caused by the incident, Carioca plunged into social work and do-gooding by way of atonement, and I seriously think she felt remorse — although she is an actress, and it is not always easy to tell what she thinks ....

It was a cool, fresh morning. The slithes moved contentedly around their pens, their emotion-sensitive skins showing a neutral brown which changed to the pink of pleasure as the little reptiles saw my approach. They are friendly creatures. I chose six animals which looked as though they would be shedding their skins before long and placed them in a separate pen to become attuned to each other; in this way I would ensure that Carioca Jones' gloves were of uniform emotive sensitivity.

The S.P. girls worked in the small factory, grunting sullenly when I looked in and greeted them. Then my Bonded man Dave arrived to tell me someone wanted to see me outside. He never looks at me when he speaks; like the S.P. girls, he resents me because I am a Freeman. Because I haven't committed a crime.

A small man squatted in the yard, regarding the slithes with interest. He stood on hearing my approach and held out his hand. "Bob Gallaugher," he said. "I'm from the State Penitentiary." His face was round and rosy; he wore oversize glasses, and his hand was flabby. He looked as though it would do him good to climb a mountain.

"Anything wrong? Have the girls been making complaints again?" I chuckled. Every time I reported an S.P. girl for inefficiency, she reported me for rape. It was a sort of game.

"No, no .... It's not that. Uh ...." He hesitated. "I understand you have some influence over Miss Carioca Jones, if you know what I mean."

"No, I don't know what you mean."

"I'm expressing myself badly. I was told that you were a friend of hers. I've been asked to contact you, to see if you can help us. It's important, Sagar." His huge spectacles flashed in the morning sun; they were his only distinguishing feature. "I understand Miss Jones and her, uh, organization are planning a march on the state pen next month."

"That's what she said. She's gunning for the Ambulatory Organ Pool."

"We would like you to use your

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influence to persuade her to desist. A demonstration at that time would be extremely embarrassing to the penitentiary and, indeed, the government."

I felt annoyance boiling up. "Look, I said I had no influence over the woman. I can't help you. Right now I'm busy."

He began babbling something about repercussions when there was a merciful interruption in the shape of the morning Flymart which roared down from the sky and landed nearby, sending the slithes scuttling for the safety of their hutches as the downdraft whirled dust and leaves around the yard. The hatch slid open and the mechanical voice began extolling the day's bargain offer while the shelves rotated, displaying tempting wares. I strolled across, Gallaugher yelping at my heels.

"Merely a publicity stunt," he was shouting as I selected a can of weed killer and the voice repeated the price. "To attract attention to herself and this pathetic Revival Season of hers. The trouble is, it works both ways. The Revival Season is comtemporaneous with the march."

"What?"

"The march takes place on the morning of the second day of the Revival Season."

I considered this information as the Flymart clipped my card. Gallaugher was right; Carioca's timing was good. She would doubtless announce the march on the opening night of the Revival, thus securing the support of the influential people to whom she had given complimentary tickets. In subsequent days the reports and publicity over the march would increase the attendance at the Revival Season and her position in Peninsula society, such as it was, would be reinforced.

The Flymart bounded into the sky after loudly hoping to be of service to me again, and I escorted Gallaugher firmly to his car. He talked all the way, and in the end I agreed to sound Carioca out the next time I saw her — but I didn't hold out much hope.

In fact I didn't see Carioca for several days, by which time the papers and Newspocket had carried details of a bill before the government which, if passed, would abrogate the Ambulatory Organ Pool. It was an opposition bill; during the next week the whole matter blew up into an emotional national issue, and I could understand why Gallaugher was under pressure to get the march canceled. The government took the stand that life-prisoners atoned for their crimes — as they should — by making their organs available for transplants. The supporters of the

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bill stressed the inhumanity of compulsory donations and the possibilities of corruption. The arguments waxed furious.

Carioca invited me to her house at Deep Cove one morning. She was, of course, delighted at the fact that her march might have national repercussions. Chattering about this, she led me into the house and introduced me to a stocky, sour-faced individual who was drinking gin. I never quite trust a man who drinks gin.

"Joe Sagar, this is douglas sutherland. Joe, darling, douglas spells his name with a small d and a small s. Isn't that just too *intriguing*?"

To me it seemed an affectation worthy of a culture hound, and I immediately assumed sutherland was some sort of arty-crafty type whom Carioca had hired for staging her Revival — or Resurrection, as unkind people had been referring to it recently.

Then sutherland and I shook hands, and he kept his gloves on, and under the leather his fingers were cold and hard and metallic ....

"I know you have mixed feelings about the Foes of Bondage, Joe," said Carioca after the three of us had filled our glasses and exchanged pleasantries. "And I will admit frankly that some of our members have been known to act a little *strangely* at times. But I asked you here to meet douglas because he is an example to you of all that is *hideous* in our penal system. He has kindly agreed to be our figurehead on the march, a symbol of man's bestial inhumanity to man. Douglas, *darling*, show Joe your hands. Douglas has done *time*," she whispered to me in a theatrical aside as the ex-con peeled his gloves.

I wasn't quite sure what to say; I wasn't quite sure what my reaction was supposed to be. Sutherland held his hands out, glittering and sterile in the light of a strategically placed lamp standard. They looked like ordinary hands, except that they were stainless steel. Carioca was watching me expectantly. She wore gloves, and I knew she hadn't told sutherland that she, herself, had once taken advantage of that Organ Pool .... Sutherland flexed his fingers and I tried not to think of Joanne.

"A Freeman crushed his hands in a farming accident," he said, almost apologetically. "I was his size, near enough. That's all there is to it. I got remission for it, of course." He didn't replace the gloves.

"Terrible," I murmured, deeply embarrassed. This was a most depressing scene, and I couldn't think why Carioca should have wanted to inflict it on me.

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Well, let's all freshen up our drinks, shall we?" said Carioca brightly, sensing that her little party was dragging. "Then douglas has a *fascinating* surprise for us all."

Douglas meanwhile was struggling with Nag the moray, who had been attracted by the flashing fingers and possibly thought they were a new type of fishing lure. The brute was wrapped around his legs, head lunging as it snapped repeatedly at the bright steel. "Carioca, will you get this bastard away from me?" he grunted, trying not to spill his gin.

"Oh, dear, he's *such* a fussy old fish," said Carioca, hauling Nag away by his jeweled collar. "He does so love people." The moray had no perceptible neck, and the collar was tightly clamped to the flesh so that the outline of the implanted oxygenator was clearly visible behind the gills. I was surprised at the fish's comparatively good nature and wondered how long it would last. Nag's predecessor, the ill-fated Wilberforce, had been notorious for his mercurial temper.

As Carioca led us into an adjoining room, Nag writhed after us, and I was aware of a deep hatred for the beast emanating from douglas. In the past Carioca's bizarre pets had been instrumental in driving away her house guests, and I wondered if history would repeat itself. In the next room stood a large stove-enameled machine with various protuberences; douglas halted beside it, and the moray curled up near his feet. It seemed to have taken to him.

"Joe, *darling*, this is the surprise I was telling you about. It's a wonderful machine and it's so new that it's not available to the general public, but I was able to use my influence to rent it. And it needs a trained *artist* to operate it. Like douglas. Isn't that *wonderful*? Now that's why I invited you here tonight. I'm so excited that I *had* to tell someone — and I know I can trust you not to tell a *soul*."

"What does it do?" I asked.

Douglas took over. "The machine is known as a Sculptograph. Basically it's a highly sensitive X-ray device, computer-coupled for reverse forecasting, with a built-in cellular redistribution facility."

There was a strong smell in the room, and for a moment I thought the warmth from the machine was affecting Nag, but then douglas took up a plain metal box and slid back the lid, exhibiting a lump of raw fish. I waited for him to tell me what it was all about. He shut the box and pushed it into a square hole in the machine.

"Maybe you ought to *demonstrate*, douglas," said Carioca excitedly.

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He glanced at her. "I thought we'd been through all that."

She flushed. "I meant on something *small*."

Douglas addressed me. "Would you like to give it a try?"

"I'd rather you explained more first, thanks." There was a pulpy-looking mask protruding from the side of the machine, about which I was not happy.

"Give me your hand." He took hold of me with his hard cold fingers and examined my skin closely. "Have you had that wart long?"

"About five years, I suppose."

He smiled, threw a switch and the hum of the machine deepened. "I'll get rid of it for you," he said, pressing my finger against the pulpy thing. Carioca uttered a little squeal of excitement, and I began to feel scared as my skin tingled to a million tiny pinpricks. Around the edge of the flesh, viscous fluid oozed. I had a sudden vision of douglas sutherland, demented by the loss of his hands, revenging himself on humanity by dissolving people's fingers. Carioca was smiling at me, her heavily made-up face a mask of anticipation. Sutherland was peering at a screen, making constant adjustments to the banks of dials and switches.

"Douglas used to be a surgeon before, you know," said Carioca. I wondered what his crime had been. The opportunities for a surgeon are almost unlimited.

"You can take your finger away now," he said at last, throwing a switch and straightening up.

I examined my finger anxiously. It looked normal, even better than normal. The flesh was plump, the skin clear, smooth. The wart was gone.

Sutherland explained. "An image of your finger, in depth, was relayed to the computer which then calculated the rate of decay of the flesh consistency, the muscle tone, the skin texture and so on, having regard to your age and the constant regeneration of body cells during your life to date. By its unique capacity for reverse forecasting the machine was then able to predict the composition and appearance of your finger ten years ago — the time selected by me. The cellular distributor — those pricks you felt — then rearranged and recharged your cells in accordance with the computer's findings. The finger you see before you is identical to the finger you had ten years ago — when you had no wart."

"That's great," I said warily. My finger felt like a foreigner. "How long will it stay that way?"

"Only about three days, unfortunately. You notice it's a fraction fatter than before? Apparently you've lost weight over the last ten years. Additional cells had to be

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introduced into your system to make up the difference, and these will be rejected in due course. Your finger will then return to normal. The wart might return also, but that is debatable."

There was something preying on my mind, and I had to ask the question. "Where did the extra cells come from?"

"You saw the piece of fish in the box. It's a useful and cheap source of tissue but not compatible with human flesh and therefore not permanent, I'm afraid. No, Joe — if you want a lasting job, there's nothing to beat human meat." He chuckled coldly and I shivered, finding I felt sick. Carioca was laughing too, watching me delightedly. There was triumph in the harsh lines of her face.

Shortly afterwards I made some excuse to leave. They came to the door to see me off, and a slight but significant event occured. Douglas sutherland accidently stepped on Nag's tail. Instantly the moray coiled itself about his legs, bringing him to a stumbling halt. Carioca didn't see what happened; she was engaged in bidding me an effusive farewell — but I saw sutherland's face over her shoulder. It was a mask of disgust and horror .... Somehow, I didn't think the friendship would last long enough for sutherland to spearhead the march of the Foes of Bondage.

October came and my finger peeled; obscene little pieces of dead flesh dropping away in leprous flakes as my physiology rejected the alien cells. I wore a dressing for a few days because the appearance was so unpleasant. When eventually my finger was back to normal, the wart did not reappear; in its roundabout way, the Sculptograph had effected a cure ....

For a while I saw nothing of Carioca or sutherland, and in any case I was engrossed in the last week of the sling-gliding season — in common with most of the other inhabitants of the Peninsula. During the previous weeks the elimination events had progressed, and eventually, one Saturday in early October, the finals of the Regional Championships were held. The field had narrowed down to six competitors, one of whom was Presdee, a local man. The sea wall was crowded that afternoon, and the Foes of Bondage were there in force, chanting and waving their fists and demonstrating solidarity.

Their target was Presdee — a flamboyant pilot who had a Bonded man contracted to him. The Foes were hoping Presdee would be seriously injured, in which event they hoped his Bonded man would be obliged to donate an organ, in which event the Foes would have the opportunity of expressing their deep outrage. It seemed an

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ambivalent outlook to me — which was why I had no time for the Foes.

Presdee's turn came. I watched the spray trailing silver from the distant hydrofoil as it raced for the Fulcrum post; some distance behind followed the figure of Presdee on waterskis, the dartlike glider harnessed to his back. As the speed increased, Presdee rose into the air, kicked off the skis and tucked his legs back into the narrow fuselage. I could just make out the thin thread of the rigid Whip connecting him to the speeding boat. He angled away, gaining height as the boat slowed momentarily and veered to bring him on a parallel course. The Whip was locked into position, now projecting at right angles to the boat, rising stiffly about thirty degrees into the sky where Presdee soared. Then the Eye on the other side of the boat engaged with the Hook of the Fulcrum post and snapped the hydrogoil into a tight turn at full speed.

The flailing Whip accelerated Presdee to a speed which couldn't have been far short of three hundred miles per hour; he touched his relsease button and hurtled across the sky, heading northwards up the Strait. Shortly after he passed the second of the offshore islands, I saw him drop his marker buoy — this is used in assessing the distance of the flight — and head back towards us on a wide turn. Soon he was closing, stalling off height, and presently dropped neatly into the water not twenty yards from the finishing post. There was a storm of applause; now it was up to the judges to calculate the merit of the flight, based on time, distance, and accuracy of finish.

Presdee emerged from the water unharmed, towing his glider as he waded ashore. The Foes of Bondage screamed a few ragged obscenities, but their hearts were not in it. For them, the afternoon was a failure. I saw a few of them drift away but was more interested in an incredibly pretty girl who had caught my eye several times during the afternoon as she sat on the hood of a new hovercar, seemingly alone and wearing a vivid scarlet-striped trouser suit.

Then the speakers blared out Presdee's points, which were good, and we settled down to watch the next competitor. Doug Marshall strolled up and we exchanged a few comments; he had been eliminated early on in the competition, and now the Peninsula had only Presdee to root for. With Marshall was Charles, who had once been his Bonded man but was now his close friend and business associate, a situation which the Foes could never understand. I pointed out the girl in scarlet, but he didn't know

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her; she was, we surmised, a sightseer from the mainland — or even the girlfriend of one of the foreign glider pilots. There was certainly something exotic about her appearance, something Latin. Then the next competitor dropped into the water nearby, and we waited for the judges' assessment. To our disappointment, he had done even better than Presdee.

Almost without realizing it I found that I had edged away from Marshall and was close to the beautiful girl. I casually turned around and looked at her .... And it seemed that I fell right into the deep, dark pools of her eyes, and my heart pounded as my body responded urgently and involuntarily to her indescribable animal magnetism. I think she was smiling as I stared at her and tried to control myself, tried to understand what was happening, why the sight of a face could affect me like this.

"Hello," she said. Her voice was very quiet, almost a whisper and meant for me alone. "I'd like you to take me for a drive."

We were isolated. I looked around, buy everyone was intent on the progress of the next competitor; the girl and I were invisible to the world at large, not really a part of it. I found that I had lifted her down from her perch on the hood, my hands brushing against her breasts, and helped her into the car. I seated myself behind the wheel, heard the turbine whir and felt the vehicle rise from the ground without being aware of having touched the controls. I had no idea what I was doing, where I was going. I was only conscious of the girl beside me, the personification of beauty and sensuality.

So after a while I stopped the car — I can't remember where it was — and took hold of her with rough disbelieving urgency, as though she might vanish if I didn't hurry. I kissed her full lips, my body straining towards her as the dark eyes stared into mine.

And there was something wrong ....

There was something wrong, something calculating and familiar and horrible about those knowing black eyes.

"Well, Joe, *darling*," trilled the voice of Carioca Jones, "*now* do you believe how beautiful I used to be?"

At last I knew what was in Carioca's mind. After I'd dropped her off at her house — she was tinkling with girlish laughter at the way she'd hookwinked me — I had time to recover and work it out. Apparently douglas sutherland had a dual purpose. Not only was he to be a visible example of the iniquities of the Ambulatory Organ Pool during the march, but he had also been commissioned to supply

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Carioca with a new face for the Revival Season. It was characteristic of her to have been unable to wait until the opening night before having a trial run ....

Coincidently, a few nights later I saw a repeat of one of Carioca's old movies on 3-V. I sat in my darkened room while the images performed in the alcove, and I saw remarkable proof of the accuracy with which the Sculptograph had re-created the young Carioca. The girl on the 3-V, an actress in the bloom of her womanhood and stardom, was facially identical to the monster whom I'd kissed in the car. The style of make-up was different, of course, and Carioca's present body was a shade thinner, more angular than that of the lush young beauty on the 3-V. But it was still amazing, and I could visualize the sensation which she would cause when she stepped onto the stage on the opening night of the Revival. Right now, however, I thought viciously, she was probably molting ....

Douglas sutherland came to see me one evening. We sat in the room overlooking the Strait and watched the pale sky darken, while I drank Scotch and he sipped at a vodka martini; I don't keep gin in the house.

"I'm worried about Carioca," he said.

"You're wasting your time."

He was clattering his steel fingers together nervously. "Look, Joe, I need your help. I think I've started something I don't know how to stop. You know Carioca's been having facial treatment from the Sculptograph?"

"I had noticed. It seemed effective enough."

He gulped at his drink. "Too effective. She was so delighted with the result that I thought she'd go insane when the rejection set in a couple of days later. My *God*." He stared absently out of the window, and I saw him wince as he recalled what must have been the grandfather of all scenes. "She insisted that I treat her again immediately, of course."

"You mean she has another new face?"

"This is her third. It's become like a drug to her. I never knew it was possible for a woman to be so vain .... I shouldn't have given in to her. I should have given her one treatment on the opening night of the Revival, like we'd agreed, then got the hell out. The rent of the machine alone is costing her a fortune, and there's my fee as well."

"So what are you worried about?"

He stared at me. "You hate her, don't you. You really hate her. God, Sagar, I thought you were supposed to be her friend."

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I wondered if I ought to tell him about Carioca and Joanne, and the hand graft — but decided against it. It had nothing to do with the present issue.

"I'm a business aquaintance, that's all," I said firmly. "I'm not Carioca's keeper. If she wants to go broke, it's no business of mine. And if you want my advice, I'd say you ought to cut your losses and get out. Carioca can be pretty peculiar when the chips are down. Don't get involved — that 's the best advice I can give."

There was alarm on his face. "She owes me a hell of a lot of money. Not only fees; there's my expenses as well. I'm not a rich man, Sagar. I'm not long out of the State Pen, for Christ's sake!"

I was getting tired of him. He'd finished his vodka martini and was about to ask for another. It seemed a good moment to get rid of him. I muttered something about having to do a round of the pens to make sure the slithes were tucked in for the night, and eased him out of the house.

During the next week I saw Carioca around the Peninsula occasionally, always accompanied by douglas sutherland, always wearing her lovely young face, which now, alas, left me totally unmoved, even repulsed. Sutherland must have been giving her treatment after treatment ....

On the night before the opening of the Carioca Jones Revival Season, I called at her house with the slitheskin gloves. I was very satisfied with the work; the skins had matched up beautifully and had turned a constant, glowing pink when I tried the completed gloves out on one of my S.P. girls. I was looking forward to Carioca's compliments.

I rang the doorbell and waited. I could see lights behind the drapes, but there was a long pause before I heard Carioca's voice, sharp and querulous.

"Is that you, douglas? Where the hell have you been?"

"It's me, Joe Sagar. I've brought the gloves."

"Oh ... I can't see you now. Bring them to the Princess Louise tomorrow night, will you?"

"I'd rather you tried them on now, Carioca," I called. "I may have to make some alterations."

Suddenly she was screaming. "Do what you're told and get the hell out of here, Joe Sagar! Are you so stupid you can't understand simple English?"

Shocked at the venom in her voice, I backed quietly away from the closed door. There was a crack of light showing through a nearby window. I crept across and peered in.

She stood in the middle of the room, fists clenched at her sides,

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her body tense. Shards of glass glittered on the carpet, a shattered mirror hung askew on the wall. Her face was red and mottled, puffed, flaking. As I watched she raised her hands and slashed at the flesh, and a cascade of dead skin drifted to the floor, revealing more of the old Carioca beneath.

My thoughts were unfair, prejudiced. She wasn't old. But she wasn't young, either ....

She'd recently told me, bragging, that douglas sutherland was the only man in the world who could operate the Sculptograph with any degree of success; apparently the man had a unique gift, a combination of artistry and technical aptitude which, in due course, would make him a rich man. If women could become used to the idea of paying for three days' youth followed by a period of peeling ugliness which lasted almost as long .... Until then, she looked on him as her protege.

I wondered what would happen if they quarreled, now, tonight, when he returned from whereever he'd been. One thing was certain — Carioca wouldn't be able to face tomorrow night's opening audience looking the way she did now ....

Many years ago a tsunami swept out across the Pacific following the great Western Seaboard Slide, devastating the low-lying areas of the offshore islands. The Peninsula — which juts from the southern end of one such island — was totally denuded of vegetation, and people .... When civilization returned, it was to find a flat land of endless dried mud and sea-bottom debris with occasional pockets of plant life making a stunted comeback. Strange objects had been cast up on the shores, the most remarkable being the Princess Louise, a complete and virtually undamaged ocean liner, miles from the nearest water. It became the center of the town of Louise and now serves as a hotel, restaurant and theater.

By the time I arived in the lobby, there were a number of people already milling about and a great deal of speculation; somehow the rumor had gotten around that the spectacularly pretty girl who had been seen on the Peninsula recently was none other than Carioca Jones, refurbished. How this had been achieved was not known, but it made a good story, and added a touch of mystery to the procedings. Certainly, people were saying, Carioca hadn't been much in evidence lately in her normal guise — and she had publicly promised that there would be an unexpected surprise at the Revival.

I saw Gallaugher, the rotund man from the State Penitentiary, and slipped down a companionway

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to avoid him. So far as I knew, all arrangements for the Foes' march on the pen the next day had been finalized, and there was nothing anybody could do about it. I made my way to the theater and went backstage to the dressing rooms. I found a door with the hackneyed star on it, knocked and entered.

"Joe, *darling*, I'm so glad you've come. I'm just *too* sorry about the dreadful scene last night but I was feeling *prostrate* and I didn't know what I was saying. Will you forgive me?" Carioca sat alone at the make-up mirror.

I said yes, scrutinizing her face with interest. Though blotchy and dry-looking, it was greatly improved since last night. "Carioca," I said impulsively, "just forget about the Sculptograph, will you? Go onstage as you are. You look fine."

She smiled, and although her face was middle-aged and shrewd and hard, at least it was her face. "Joe, I do believe you *care*." The moray eel Nag watched me unwinking from a chair, jeweled collar glittering in the harsh light.

There was a thump outside, the door crashed open, and douglas sutherland appeared, wheeling the Sculptograph. He set it up in the middle of the room and looked from me to Carioca. I shrugged. He plugged the machine in, resignedly. I'll have to slip out for a while," he said. I won't be long. I forgot to buy the, uh, raw material."

Carioca smiled brilliantly and triumphantly, indicating the container on the chair beside Nag. "*Somehow* I thought you might, douglas, *dear*. So I took the trouble to obtain it myself. You may leave us for a while in any case; Joe is going to fit my gloves, and I *hate* to be watched while I'm dressing."

I sensed a definite rift between them. Carioca was spraying her hair with Ultrasorb; her eyes were cold as she watched him leave. "*Such* a tiresome creature," she murmured. Her face stood out a glaring white, and the blotches were accentuated by the light-absorbing black of her hair. "Show me the gloves, Joe, darling."

I unwrapped the box and brought out the gloves. Carioca removed her present pair and, with sqeals of delight, drew the smooth new skin over her hands, past the graft scars, up to her elbows; she smiled at me, and the slitheskin glowed pink .... She held them up to the light, and Nag lifted his black head to watch. Then she peeled them off. "I mustn't get them dirty while I'm having my treatment," she said. "There's always so much nastly stuff oozing around. It's *quite* repulsive, really. I can't think .... Oh!"

She was staring past me; her hands had risen to her mouth, and

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the graft scars showed pallid against the Ultrasorb of her long hair — and it was too late to correct the involuntary movement. She tried to hide them, she clutched her wrists as I turned round and saw douglas sutherland standing there, his steel fingers clicking, clicking as he stared at her hands, and stared .... I edged away. I wanted to get out. Suddenly, I needed a drink.

Carioca's eyes snapped and she stood decisively, arms at her sides. "All right, douglas, so I had a graft job a long time ago. It has nothing to do with you, my dear man. Now, if you will prepare the machine, I will have my treatment. If you don't mind. If you want to get paid."

Douglas stood like a statue, fingers clicking. There was no trace of expression on his face. The moray eel stirred, slid down the chair leg and across the floor towards him, collar scratching on the bare boards. Carioca eyed him haughtily, having played her trump. Then douglas stepped forward, took a rubber skullcap and fitted it over Carioca's hair. He took up the mask. I left them there.

The auditorium was crowded, and it was noticeable that a large proportion of the audience were women — presumably the Foes of Bondage. I saw a number of people I recognized; most of the sling-gliding club were there, drinks in hand as they pushed their way to seats, and I was surprised to see Miranda Marshbanks, fashionable pet octopus draped around her shoulders, sitting in the front row. I hurried to the bar.

"I see the Foes are here in force," said a voice. I found that I was standing next to Gallaugher; it was too late to avoid him now. "This is a compensation for their missing the march tomorrow, I imagine."

"What do you mean?" I asked. There was something in the prison officer's eyes; an unpleasant satisfaction.

"Didn't you know? You business acquaintance Carioca Jones has canceled the demonstration at the pen."

This was surprising news. "She said nothing to me about it. I've only just left her."

"It's not the sort of thing she'd tell you, not right now." He was looking cunning, and I realized how much I disliked him. I tried to move away but he moved with me. "Everyone has their price," he was saying, his voice a trifle slurred. His eyes looked unfocused behind the large glasses. "Even the President of the Foes of Bondage has her price."

I turned on him, infuriated. "Look here, Gallaugher, I can't imagine anything stopping Carioca Jones once she's decided to stage a

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demonstration. You seem to think you know something which I don't. So if you want to tell me, then tell me. If you don't, then don't; it's all the same to me. I'm not interested, man."

And the obscene creature was gripping my arm, kneading the flesh. "Tell me, what sort of a bribe would you offer Carioca Jones, right now?" he asked. "I know all about douglas sutherland, Sagar — he was one of my inmates. If you were the administrative officer of the goddamned Ambulatory Organ Pool, what sort of bribe, eh? Eh?" He kneaded, and kneaded, and I jerked my arm away, sick, and jabbed him fiercely in the stomach with my elbow. There was silence all around as people realized a fight was starting.

Then we heard the screams.

They came high and shrill, desolate and demented, from somewhere behind the stage. Douglas sutherland appeared suddenly, striding down the auditorium and out of the back door, his expression blank. The screams continued as a nervous whispering built up among the audience. Fear clutched at my chest as I forgot Gallaugher and his insinuating manner and wondered why sutherland had run out like that.

The screaming came closer; it seemed to fill the hall with terror, echoing from the walls and entering people's minds, nudging them into sympathetic fear. I shivered. The sounds were barely human, and they were getting closer.

Suddenly the stage curtains were bulging and shaking, rippling violently as though somebody was trying to fight their way through. Near me a woman was muttering "Oh, my God; oh, my God ..." quietly, over and over. The lights dimmed. The spotlight focused on the curtains. The lighting man obviously deemed this to be the moment we'd been waiting for. Stagehands are notoriously insensitive; they've seen it all before ....

The curtains slashed down the center, and a *creature* appeared, blinking at the light, her screams dying to whimpers as the brightness hit her and illuminated her old, old face, her leathery wrinkled skin, her vulture's neck of empty pouched flesh....

She stood slightly crouched, her fingers crooked before her; but there was nothing aggressive in her stance — it was more as though she was backing away from an attack. She wore a plain black dress which accentuated the pallor of her legs, her arms, her face. She was Death incarnate; it seemed impossible that a creature so old, so ugly, should possess the gift of life. Slowly she raised her hands until they shadowed her face and the spotlight picked out the white graft

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scars on her wrists. She gripped the folds of the curtain above her head while a trickle of spittle glistened at the corner of her slack lips, and the most terrible thing was her breasts, high and pale and full and *youthful*, voluptuous, as they rose from under her dress when she arched her back as though in terminal agony.

For an instant she stood rigid; in the dazzling light she couldn't have seen us, and it was just possible she was not aware of her audience, or even of her whereabouts. Her single final scream died away into a croak, and she sagged; her arms dropped to her sides; her ancient eyes grew slitted and cunning as she glanced quickly from side to side, seized the curtain and whirled it about her like a cloak. We heard the echo of a cackle of laughter. The folds fell back into place, the stage was empty. She was gone.

The audience burst into tumultuous, relieved applause. Everything was all right. It was Carioca Jones' surprise. She was one hell of an actress.

I found that I was still standing by the bar; Gallaugher was nearby, looking thoughtful; douglas sutherland was just a memory of a quick-striding figure. There was an image burned into my brain, indelibly Carioca Jones, an ancient screaming crone. There was a whirring as the curtain rolled back revealing the projection area, and the title of the first movie appeared, disembodied, hanging in midair while music trumpeted. The audience relaxed, settled back.

And sutherland was gone. The Sculptograph was built around a computer programmed for reverse forecasting — but wouldn't it be just as simple, maybe simpler, for the machine to project its forecast forward into the future? To predict the continued slackening of muscles, deterioration of cellular matter, aging of skin — and to calculate the result?

An ancient crone.

My mouth was dry. I don't know why I felt as I did; I have no great affection for Carioca Jones. But there are things which just should not happen to a person. I wondered if she had the stregnth to withstand the next few days, until the rejection process took place and her face returned to normal.

The rejection process ....

I seized Gallaugher's arm. "What was the bribe?" I shouted. "How did you persuade her to cancel the march?" Heads turned and people made hushing noises. "What the hell did you give her?" I yelled.

His eyes were wide; I think he'd guessed what was in my mind. "I ... uh ... she received a donation from

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the pool, Sagar," he muttered. He gulped at his drink.

I remembered douglas sutherland's remark, weeks ago as he stood by that devilish machine and basked in his own cleverness. "If you want a lasting job, there's nothing to beat human meat ...." Human flesh ... a lasting job, permanent, carried out by the only man in the world who could operate the Sculptograph ....

And douglas sutherland was gone.

I told the bartender to call an ambulance.

I left Gallaugher standing there and made for the dressing room at a run.

Carioca was lying on the floor of the room with the hackneyed star, and there was blood all around her, seeping away from jagged slashes in her wrists; and as I swallowed heavily and tried not to vomit, I remember thinking: this is a stagy way for Carioca to die — to expunge the guilt by the symbolic gesture towards amputating her hands ... I think the horror of the sight had shifted my mind from reality, because I knew she'd chosen the most convenient method, and that was all there was to it.

I found some flimsy pieces of clothing and tied them tightly above the wounds, and the flow of blood seemed to decrease, but maybe that was because Carioca hadn't much blood left. I sat in a chair and waited for the ambulance, knowing there was nothing more I could do, wondering why I felt guilty — because I was not responsible. I was involved — and in any one of a dozen ways I could perhaps have prevented this climax — but I was not responsible. Before me lay the result of a combination of circumstances, of temperaments, of chance.

At last the ambulance men arrived, uniformed and laconic, and they took her away and left me alone with the blood. An announcement had been made in the auditorium, but nobody was interested; they were all watching the Carioca Jones Revival Season, where a beautiful and insubstantial young girl cavorted about the stage, and that young girl was a much nicer thing to think about than the dreadful and slightly unreal old hag lying on the hospital bed.

I wondered if she would thank me for saving her, when she woke, if she woke; or whether she would call me every kind of bastard for condemning her to a life of ugliness. I wondered if she would then try again, discreetly while I was not around, after smashing every mirror in the house but unable to smash the mirror in her own mind .... And I wondered about douglas sutherland.

Maybe he hadn't known what

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was in the container. Certainly Carioca wouldn't have told him. There would have been no need for him to open the lid of the box before slotting it into the Sculptograph. Another circumstance, another chance. Quite likely he'd only intended her living hell to last three days.

I could hear the music and the voices from the distant 3-V equipment as I stood and walked around the room. Sometimes a man thinks of the most inconsequential things, and I'd just remembered Nag, the moray eel. Somebody had to look after the brute. I looked in the wardrobes, under the dresser, but I couldn't see him anywhere. I wondered if he'd gotten out and was wandering around the corridors.

Then, on top of the Sculptograph, I saw a glittering, jeweled circlet.

Just a pet's collar, nothing more.

I peered into the maw of the Sculptograph. The container was not in position. The square hole was open, and in the dark recesses of the machine I could see a residue, which gave off a distinctive smell. I swallowed, wondered about that insane sense of humor which was douglas sutherland's, looked around and saw the container still on the chair against the wall, where Carioca had left it.

I slid back the lid, and looked inside ....

Horror is relative, and I think I was laughing as I left the room.

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MOVING AHEAD

People sometimes get impatient with me because I keep insisting that nothing that has ever taken place in human history can be properly understood without taking into account the effect of technological change. I had a friend, twenty years ago, who kept saying to me, "How do you explain the Crusades in terms of technological change?"

I knew what he meant. He thought it was all a matter of religious enthusiasm, of knights being caught up in a vision of the Holy Land under the heel of the foul Paynim.

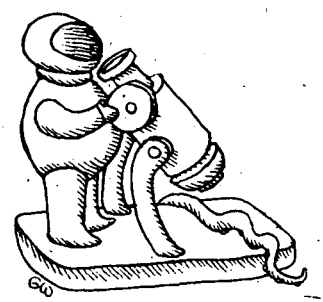
I thought about it and, eventually, I said—

"About the year 1000, the technological collapse in the west-European provinces of the Roman Empire began to lift. The invention of the moldboard plow meant that the dank soils of northwestern Europe could be efficiently turned. The invention of the horsecollar and the horseshoe meant that the more efficient horse could replace the ox as a plow-puller. All this meant that food production shot up and population increased.

"With the nobility increasing in number in particular (they got the best of the food) while the quantity of land did not, the average size of

ISAAC ASIMOV

Science



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the fief decreased, and even so there were an increasing number of landless knights. These made the air of northwestern Europe horrid with their eternal fighting, and, by 1095, the Pope was only too glad to get rid of quantities of them by sending them off to the east to inflict themselves on the foul Paynim. Religion was the excuse, not the basic cause."

My friend couldn't bring himself to accept that, but I wonder what he would say today. Out in Lebanon (which was part of the Kingdom of Jerusalem that was set up in 1099 by the Crusaders) there is a civil war (as I write) between the Moslems and Christians, with the Christians badly outnumbered and sure to be defeated in the not-so-long run. This is precisely the situation that started a Crusade every time nine centuries ago. Even as recently as 1958, a similar but far less dangerous civil war in Lebanon had Eisenhower sending in the marines.

And now? Is it because of the decline in religious fervor in the west? Partly, I suppose (and that is, to a great extent, because of the rise of science-based technology in recent centuries).

Is it because western Christianity no longer presents a united front thanks to the Protestant Reformation and the growth of secularism? Partly, I suppose (though both the Reformation and secularism would scarcely have been possible without the printing press).

But does anyone doubt that, for the most part, it's a case of religious sympathy being totally outweighed by the fears of an oil boycott, for perfectly obvious technological reasons?

Or let's take something that seems even more removed from technology than the Crusades do — the quality (such as it is) of my writing.

Reviewers are prone to talk about my "enthusiasm," my "liveliness," my "warmth." My excitement about my subject seems to stick out all over my writings, and one would suppose that this is the result of my own particular ebullient and extroverted personality.

I can't deny that I *am* ebullient and extroverted, of course, but nevertheless technology is also required. The reason the ebullience has a chance to show up in my writing is that it doesn't evaporate in the process of converting thoughts into words. I think quickly in unspoken words and sentences, and I need a device that will put them on paper as fast as they are created.

A quill pen wouldn't do it; nor would a steel pen, a fountain pen, or a ball-point pen. I can, and have, written articles and stories the size of this one or even longer in pen-and-ink, but it's a painful job and I can't keep it up very long at a time. If that were the only way I could write, the quality, I

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assure you, would be different — more somber. Even an ordinary typewriter won't do, since I wear out, pounding those keys, after an hour or so.

No, what is needed is an electric typewriter, which requires only a delicate touch and on which I can stroke out my ninety words a minute through a whole reasonably-long working day if I feel like. Such a typewriter allows me to see what I write (dictating is like walking through a crowded thoroughfare with one's eyes closed), and it keeps up with me so that I lose none of my excitement in the irrelevant processes of shaping a letter or pushing down a key by force.

So now let's go on analyzing American history in terms of technological advance — something I began last month.

I ended last month's essay by pointing out that Frederick the Great had predicted that the United States was too large to hold together. And yet it *has* held together even under the explosive disintegrating force of the most systematically resolute civil war ever fought.

How?

It was a matter of transportation and communication. Frederick felt that neither messages nor goods could travel from end to end of the new nation quickly enough, so that different parts would lose touch with each other and tend, in time, to go their own way.

It didn't occur to him that there might be fundamental changes in transportation and communication. Why should there be? There hadn't been for four thousand years. To be sure, the steam engine had been invented as a new source of power, but it was just beginning to show its potentialities at the time the United States had won recognition of its independence, and Frederick missed that point.

Others did not. If the steam engine could turn a wheel in a textile factory, it could turn a wheel on the side of a boat, and if that wheel were equipped with paddles, the steam engine would become, so to speak, a mechanical and tireless galley slave who would row a ship against wind and current.

The basic concept was simple, and by 1785, John Fitch (born in Windsor, Connecticut, on January 21, 1743) had already thought of it. By 1790, he had a steamship travelling up and down the Delaware River from Philadelphia to Trenton on a regular schedule.

Unfortunately, John Fitch's middle name was Bad-Luck. Nothing had ever worked for him. He had had little schooling, a harsh father, and a

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nagging wife (whom he deserted). When he made some money with a gun factory in the Revolutionary War, he was paid in Continental currency which became worthless. The last part of the war he passed as a British prisoner.

Even with his steamship running, then, after superhuman efforts to raise capital and to square the legal aspects with five different states, he found he couldn't inveigle passengers aboard. His financial backers drifted away, and when a storm destroyed his ship in 1792, he was through.

He went to France to try again, but got there in 1793 at the most turbulent portion of the French Revolution and could obtain no funds. He returned to the United States and died in Bardstown, Kentucky, on July 2, 1798, probably through suicide.

Do you think that ended his bad luck? Not at all! He invented the steamship, but how many people know that? Ask anyone, and he'll tell you that Robert Fulton did.

Fulton was born in Little Britain, Pennsylvania (a town that is now called Fulton) on November 14, 1765. About the time Fitch died, Fulton, who had gone to Great Britain after the Revolution, began to think about powered ships.

In 1797, he went to France and spent years trying to devise a workable submarine. His most nearly successful one was built in 1801 and he named it *Nautilus.* The name at least was a triumph. In 1870, Jules Verne wrote "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea" and named Captain Nemo's submarine, *Nautilus,* after Fulton's craft. Then, in 1955, the United States launched the first nuclear-powered submarine, and named it *Nautilus,* after Nemo's craft.

Fulton also worked on surface vessels and tried to run a steamship up and down the Seine River. It didn't work and although Great Britain and France (who were in the first years of what was to prove a twenty-year war) were sensible of the war application of steam propulsion, neither nation felt like investing much in crazy schemes.

In 1806, Fulton returned to the United States and continued his experiments on the Hudson River. He had the financial backing of Robert R. Livingston (one of the five-man committee that had once been charged with writing the Declaration of Independence, and a man who had served as the United States Minister to France when Fulton was there). Fulton built a steamship he called *Clermont,* and on August 7, 1807, she began chugging up the Hudson River. She reached Albany in 32 hours

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maintaining an average speed of 8 kilometers (5 miles) per hour.

Though Fulton did not build the first working steamship, he built the first one to make a profit, and I suppose that counts. He died of pneumonia on February 24, 1815, contracted after working on the open deck of a steamship under construction during bad weather, but by that time there was a fleet of steamships operating under his direction.

What the steamship did for the United States was make the great rivers of the nation highways in both directions, *up*stream as well as down. By the 1850s, the steamship on the Mississippi River was living through a golden age, forever enshrined in Mark Twain's "Life on the Mississippi."

From earliest times, the sea was easier to cross than the land was. The sea was level and navigable in all directions. The land was hilly, swampy, rocky, sandy, and, in general, navigable with only the greatest difficulty on anything but legs, except where decent roads exist; and these, until the twentieth century, were so few as to be almost non-existent.

The turning point came when the steam engine was used to turn wheels on a locomotive ("self-moving") that could, in turn, pull a train* of passenger or freight cars behind it. The amount of energy that would have to have been used to force the wheels of all those cars over uneven, rocky, muddy ground would have been quite unthinkable, so the trick was to lay down a pair of parallel rails (first of wood, eventually of steel) on which the wheels could turn as unimpeded as a ship could move over the sea.

The inventor of the steam locomotive was the Englishman, Richard Trevithick, born in Illogan, Cornwall, on April 13, 1771. As early as 1796, he was designing steam locomotives and was the first to demonstrate that smooth metal wheels could find enough traction on smooth metal rails to allow motion, thanks to the weight pressing one against the other.

In 1801, Trevithick had locomotives in operation, but, like Fitch, he was plagued with misfortune. Though his locomotives worked, he had to face insufficient steam, too much fire, broken axles, public hostility, and so on. In the end he gave up and went to South America to sell steam engines.

As in the case of Fitch, the credit for Trevithick's invention went elsewhere. Unlike Fitch, Trevithick lived to see that.

The inventor who got the credit was George Stephenson, who was born in Wylam, Northumberland, on June 9, 1781. He had the advantage of having a father who worked with steam engines and who introduced him

**The word can be applied to any series of like objects in single file.*

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to the field. He had the disadvantage of being uneducated and illiterate. In his late teens, he attended night school to learn to read in order that he might be able to go through the works of James Watt.

He began to build locomotives, and in 1825, one of his locomotives pulled thirty-eight small cars along rails at speeds of from 20 to 25 kilometers (12 to 16 miles) per hour. It was the first *practical* steam locomotive built, and by 1830, Stephenson and his co-workers had eight engines at work on a railroad between Liverpool and Manchester. For the first time in the history of the world, land transportation at a rate faster than that of a galloping horse became possible.

(Poor Trevithick was still in South America, and, with his usual bad luck, found himself caught up in the colonial revolution against Spain and forced to fight on the side of the rebels. The only way he could return to England was, ironically enough, by borrowing money from Stepenson's son, who happened to be in South America at the time and whose money came from the dividends of his father's successful railroad. Trevithick died in Dartford, Kent, in poverty, on April 22, 1833.)

The United States was neck-and-neck with Great Britain as far as the railroad was concerned. In 1825, one John Stevens built the first locomotive in the United States to run on rails — on a half-mile track near his home in Hoboken, New Jersey.

In 1827, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad was chartered. On July 4, 1828, the 52nd anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, work on the first passenger and freight railroad in the United States began in Baltimore. The ground was broken by Charles Carroll, who at that time, at the age of 92, was the last surviving signer of the Declaration.* On May 24, 1830, the first thirteen miles of track opened.

More than any other nation in the world, the United States threw itself into an orgy of railroad building. Within ten years, its lines of railroad track numbered 4,500 kilometers (2,800 miles) and within thirty years 48,000 kilometers (30,000 miles.)

Through all the history of the world, transportation and communication were almost synonymous. In general, a message came only with a messenger who had to cover ground on his feet, on a horse, a ship, or, for that matter, a railroad. The only messages that could arrive ahead of a messenger were those that were sent by sight or sound — semaphore signals, reflection-flashes, smoke signals, tom-toms, and so on. These were

**Carroll died on November 14, 1832, aged 95.2 years.*

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all limited in range. The turning point came with the use of the electric current.

The Italian, Allesandro Volta, invented the chemical battery in 1800, and an electric current was reliably produced for the first time. The Dane, Hans Christian Oersted, discovered electromagnetism in 1820, and, immediately afterward, the Frenchman, Andre Marie Ampere, worked out the theory of electric currents. The Englishman, Michael Faraday, introduced the electric generator in 1831 and made the current cheap enough for routine and massive use. The American, Joseph Henry, invented the electromagnet in 1829, the electric relay, and the electric motor in 1831 — all of which made the current open for use in a versatile way.

The first striking application of the current came through an artist, Samuel Finley Breese Morse, born in Charlestown, Massachusetts, on April 27, 1791.

Morse is not, to me, a very attractive person. He did not feel any particular bonds of patriotism to the United States and lived in Great Britain at ease throughout the War of 1812. When he returned to the United States and entered politics, it was as a member of the Native American party (a group of bigoted anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant people, usually and appropriately called the "Know-Nothings"). During the Civil War, he was strongly pro-South, since he was an anti-Black who believed slavery a good thing.

During the 1830s, Morse caught the fever of electrical experimentation from Charles Thomas Jackson, a fellow passenger on an ocean voyage. (Jackson was an eccentric scientist of considerable brilliance who half-discovered a number of things, engaged in endless quarrels over priority, and died insane.)

Morse knew little about electricity but met Joseph Henry by chance. Henry, a person of warm benevolence, helped Morse without stint, answering all his questions and explaining the workings of the electric relay. Morse, a person of icy selfishness, absorbed everything and in later legal battles over priority tried to pretend he had obtained nothing from Henry.

Both Henry and the British physicist, Charles Wheatstone, had built working systems of what came to be called the "telegraph," but Morse added something of considerable importance, a system of clicks spaced at long and short intervals that could serve as a "Morse code" for sending messages. He also contributed a kind of remorseless promotion that

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succeeded in raising money from unlikely sources.

He obtained a patent for his telegraph system in 1840, then in 1843 managed to persuade and bully a reluctant Congress by a margin of six votes into appropriating $30,000 for his use in building a telegraph line over the forty-mile stretch from Baltimore to Washington. It was completed in 1844, and Morse's first message, in Morse code, was "What hath God wrought?" a quotation from the Bible (Numbers 23:23). For the first time a messengerless-message could be made to go *any* distance, all but instantaneously.

Before the year was out, the telegraph was being used by reporters to announce the details of the Democratic presidential nominating convention. Before five years had passed, telegraphic communication was established between New York and Chicago, and by the time of the Civil War, the telegraph lines criss-crossed the nation.

By 1860, then, the United States was knit together by land, by sea, and by wire, and it could not fall apart by centrifugal force alone simply because one part was out of touch with the other. Frederick was wrong: he had not taken technological advance into account.

But the United States *did* threaten to fall apart, not through mere incoherence, but over deep-seated and violent differences between the northern and southern tiers of states—differences that resulted in a dreadful war. How did the matter of technology prevent collapse in this case?

The northern states, which fought for Union, had a half-century history of growing industrialization. They produced iron and steel in quantity so that rails could easily be laid down and locomotives easily built. Northern industrialists, anxious to ship their goods and buy their raw materials, pushed for railroad lines across the various states, and the North was willing to cooperate in this.

The result was that, by 1860, two-thirds of the miles of railroad track in the United States existed in the northern states, and those lines were a well integrated network.

The southern states, however, adhered to belief in the virtues of Jeffersonian ruralism, and the large plantations tended to be much more self-sufficient than the units of the northern social system. There was a correspondingly weaker push toward railroads in the South, which, in any case, found railroads to be colonially expensive since all finished materials and trained engineers had to come from the North or from Great Britain.

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Furthermore, since the South was strong on states-rights as a way of protecting itself from the more populous North, which was increasingly dominating the Union, each southern state built its railroads as it saw fit without concerning itself overmuch with its neighbors. The result was that the thinner railroad network in he South was not well integrated and did not even utilize its mileage properly.

The Civil War, fought by armies of hundreds of thousands over a battlefield that stretched over a thousand miles and more, presented enormous transport and supply problems for both sides. Either a mass army must have its food and clothing brought to it by mass transportation of some sort, or it must support itself off the surrounding countryside.

Since the war was fought on Southern territory, the Union armies from the North might, on occasion, choose to live off the country as a means of weakening the morale of the enemy. Both Sherman in Georgia and Sheridan in the Shenandoah did this. Except as a deliberate army policy of "schrecklichkeit," however, the North didn't have to resort to this. Their railroads worked and their armies were well supplied (except where dishonest contractors and dishonest politicians connived to sell junk and garbage).

The southern armies, however, could not very well deplete their own countryside without destroying their own cause. And if they didn't, they were in trouble, for their railroad network was inadequate for the job, and what's more, as southern railroad equipment wore out or broke, there was almost no way of getting replacements.

The result was that the Confederate armies were always underfed, underclothed, and underarmed. They performed prodigies of valor, but to what end? The northern armies simply hung on until the factory-workers from the northern cities learned to fight as well as the farmboys and horsemen from the southern farms. Once that happened, the end was in sight for the South.

What's more, while the South slowly withered and died behind the northern blockade, the North actually grew economically stronger as the war progressed — thanks to technology.

In 1834, Cyrus Hall McCormick, born in Rockbridge County, Virginia, on February 15, 1809, patented a horse-drawn mechanical reaper that rendered unnecessary all the bending and cutting that had always been involved in the process, and let one man do the work of many.

Although McCormick was a southerner, it was not the South that demanded the machine. There were slaves to do the work cheaply enough,

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and to get the machines might raise the prospect of having to support slaves in idleness.

McCormick therefore set up his factory in Chicago, for the midwest had far more acres than farmworkers, and labor-saving devices were needed. Within a year he had sold 800 reapers, and in the 1850s, he was selling 4,000 a year.

The mechanization of agriculture was well begun, and the Midwest began to produce grain at an unprecedented rate. During the years of the Civil War the North could sell quantities of grain to a hungry Europe in return for everything it needed to keep its industries humming — while southern cotton and tobacco rotted in the fields and warehouses behind the northern blockade.

Even the loss of manpower was not serious in the North (economically, that is, for no one can measure the personal suffering produced by the bitter bloodshed among the soldiers and those who loved them).

All through the decades preceding the Civil War, immigrants had gravitated to the North, where there were factories and farms and railroads to employ them, and prosperous individuals who needed servants (who were free and who could quit when something better turned up). Few immigrants, on the other hand, tended to go to the South, where it was difficult to find labor in competition with slaves, and where unskilled labor had, in any case, the cachet of slavery about it, and where the mystique of family and breeding limited upward mobility sharply.

During the Civil War, immigration to the North actually increased, as industry and agriculture operated at forced draft, while to the South it stopped altogether. The immigrants came to the North in such over-supply that they overflowed into the army. One-third of the soldiers in the Northern armies were foreign-born.

When Grant caught Lee in the climactic battles of 1864 in Virginia, Grant could easily afford to lose two men to every one that Lee lost. Grant could rely on endless reinforcements, while Lee's losses were irreplaceable. Grant understood this and attacked steadily and relentlessly. He was called "the butcher," but he won the war.

And when the war was over, the United States had so profited from it technologically, that in wealth and in strength, it began to move ahead of the nations of Europe, even ahead of the proud monarchy of Great Britain.

This was by no means noticed at the time, however. Through habit, the American was looked upon by the European as a frontiersman without

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culture, as a kind of crude barbarian who did have a certain knack for adding up profits. He was sneered at and never taken seriously. But you know, though all through history knights have sneered at merchants, the fact is that in the long run the merchants win and the knights lose. The Dutch merchants beat the Spanish knights, and the British beat Napoleon who thought "perfidious Albion" was only "a nation of shopkeepers."

It was now the turn of the United States.

It is not surprising that the truth was more nearly plain to science fiction writers than to diplomats and generals. In 1865, when Jules Verne published "From the Earth to the Moon" about the first astronauts being shot to the Moon by a giant cannon — to whom did he attribute the feat? To Americans, of course. They made up the nation, he saw (one century in advance of fruition), that would reach the Moon.

And when did the rest of the world see it? —Well, that's for next month.

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In which Willy Newbury ("Balsamo's Mirror," June 1976) vacations at the shore and finds himself lured by an odd boardwalk concession into another supernatural adventure.

The Purple Pterodactyls

by L. SPRAGUE De CAMP

I am as ordinary, commonplace a guy as you can find: middle-sized, middle-class, middle-aged; engineer by training, banker by circumstance; with a nice wife, nice kids, nice house, and nice car. But the damndest things happen to me.

When the children were grown enough so that they could take care of themselves in summer, Denise and I spent a vacation by ourselves at the shore. My cousin Linda, who has a house there, had been raving about Ocean Bay. So we rented an apartment in a rambly wooden-frame building, a block from the beach. This was before the waterfront sprouted a host of huge condominiums, like a plague of concrete mushrooms. You could walk on the sand without stepping on somebody or getting hit in the eye with a frisbee.

We swam, we sunned, and we walked the boardwalk. The second afternoon, Denise said, "Willy, my old, why do we walk not down to the park of amusement?"

She said it in French, since we speak it a lot *en famille.* It is her native tongue, and I try to keep mine up by practice. We tried to bring the children up bilingually, but it took with only one of them.

We walked a mile to the piers and concessions. There were the usual fun house, roller coaster, and shooting gallery. There was a fortuneteller who called himself Swami Krishna. There were concessions where you threw darts at rubber balloons, or threw baseballs at plywood cats, or tossed baseballs into baskets. These baskets were so set that, when you did get your ball in, it bounced right out again and did not count. If you succeeded in such endeavors, you won teddy bears, rubber pythons, and similar junk.

I am normally immune to the lure of such games. One, however,

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showed more originality.

You bought three rubber rings, four or five inches in diameter, for half a dollar. You tossed these rings over three little posts, a couple of feet high and a mere yard from the thrower. There were three sets of these posts, forming three sides of a square.

The upper part of each post was conical, and it was no trick to get the ring over the point of the cone. To win, however, the ring had to fall down the rest of the post, which was square in cross-section and barely small enough for the ring to go over it. Nearly always, the ring hung up on the corners at the top of the square section. You had to ring all three posts at once to win a prize.

The prizes were even more original: a flock of plush-and-wire pterodactyls. They came in several models and sizes, some with long tails and some with short, some with teeth and some with long toothless beaks. The biggest were over a yard across the wings. They were made so that you could hang one from your ceiling as a mobile. If the wind was strong, you could lock the wings in place and fly the thing as a kite. They were all dyed in shades of purple.

"Purple pterodactyls!" I cried. "Darling, I've got to have one of those."

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" said Denise. "What on earth would you do with it?"

"Hang it in my study, I suppose."

"You had better not hang it where the people can see it. What do you like about these monsters?"

"I suppose it's the alliteration of the name. Only it's not a real alliteration, since you don't pronounce the *p* in 'pterodactyl'. That makes it just an eye rhyme — I mean an eye alliteration."

"In English, maybe. But in French we do pronounce the *p*: p'tero-dac-TEEL. That is what is wrong with the English; you never know when some letter at the beginning of a word is silent."

"Like 'knife,' you mean? Well, in French you never know when a letter at the *end* of a word is silent. Let me have a try at this."

The concessionaire was a short, tubby, bald man of about my age, with a big black mustache. The ends of the mustache were waxed and curled up, something like the *Schnurrbart* once worn by Kaiser Wilhelm II.

The man sold me a set of rings, and I threw.... Ten dollars and sixty rings later, I was no nearer to getting my purple pterodactyl.

"Will you sell me one of those?" I asked the proprietor. "How much?"

The man ducked a little bow. "I am so sorry, sir," he said with a

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slight accent, "but they are not for sale. Either you win them with the rings, or you do not get any."

A look from Denise told me I had better not throw any more of the Newbury fortune, such as it was, after Mesozoic reptiles just then. As we walked off, I growled something like: "I'll get one of those things if it's my last...."

"You say we can't afford a Mercedes," she said, "but you throw away money on those hideous...."

"Well, anyway," said I to change the subject, "if we go right back to the house, we can get another swim before dinner."

"Willy!" she said. "You have had one swim today. The waves are big, and you will get the sunburn. Do not kill yourself, trying to prove your manhood! You forget we are middle-aged."

"I may be middle-aged," said I with a leer, "but I can still do some of the things young men do."

"Yes, I know. You did it just this morning. Some day you will try to prove your manhood once too often, and you will have the stroke in the middle of it."

"I can't think of a better way to go."

"But think of your poor wife! Aside from the fact that I don't want to be a widow, consider how embarrassing it would be to explain to the policemen!"

Next morning, we went out for our sun-and-swim. There on the beach was our friend of the purple pterodactyls, also soaking up ultra-violet. In bathing trunks, with his pod and his jungle of graying chest hair, he was a walking argument against nudism. He had been swimming, for the water had dissolved the pomade out of his mustache, so the ends hung down in Fu-Manchurian style. He was spooning sand upon himself with a child's toy shovel.

"Hello," I said, since you never know when the unlikeliest people might want to do business with your bank. "How's the pterodactyl business?"

"Business is good," he said. "Three of my pterosaurs were won yesterday. So you see people do win sometimes. I regret that you did not. You must try again."

"I'll be back," I said. "Do you come out here every day before opening?"

"Yes. It is the only time I have, since I must be on duty from noon to midnight. It is not an easy business."

In answer to my questions, he told me something of the economics of boardwalk concessions. "Excuse me, please," he said. "Permit me to introduce myself. I am Ion Maniu, at your service. I regret that I cannot give you my card."

"I'm Wilson Newbury," I said.

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He repeated the name slowly, as if it really meant something to him. "Is there an initial?"

"Woodrow Wilson Newbury, if you want the whole thing," I told him, "but I haven't used the Woodrow in years. When I see you this afternoon, we can exchange cards." I thought Mr. Maniu's formality a little quaint but did not mean to let him outdo me.

In the afternoon, my cousin Linda wanted to take Denise on one of those endless female shopping trips, looking at hundreds of wares in dozens of stores but probably not buying anything. On these safaris, my knees give out after the first hour, like those of an old prize-fighter.

I begged off and sneaked back to Maniu's concession. All that got me was another five dollars down the drain.

I was to meet the girls at a souvenir and notion shop, combined with a branch post office, on Atlantic Avenue. While waiting, I looked over a bin full of junk rings, offered for a quarter each. They were little brass things set with pieces of colored glass, for the pleasure of vacationers' children. Some were elaborate, with coiled serpents or skulls and crossbones.

I pawed over this stuff, not meaning to buy — our own children were much too grown-up — but to pass the time and muse on the costs, mark-ups, and profits of merchandising these things. Then I came upon one that did not seem to belong. I tried it on, and it fitted.

Although dull and dirty like the rest, this ring was more massive. It felt heavier than one would expect of a brass ring of that size. That proved nothing; it could be plated or painted lead. It seemed to have once been molded in a complex design, but the ridges and grooves were so worn down as to leave only traces.

The stone was a big green glassy lump, polished but unfaceted, with the original bumps and hollows preserved like those of a stream-worn pebble.

I gave the cashier a quarter, put the ring on my finger, and met the girls. Linda started to tell me about the women's club meeting, at which she had persuaded me, with some cousinly arm-twisting, to speak. Then Denise spotted the ring.

"Willy!" she said. "What have you done now?"

"Just a junk ring out of the bin there, but it appealed to me. For twenty-five cents, what did I have to lose?"

"Let me see," said Denise. *"Hein!* This does not look to me quite like what you call the junk. Look, we have just come from Mr. Hagopian the jeweler. Let us go back there and ask him what it is."

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"Oh, girls," I said, "let's not be silly. You won't find a Hope diamond in a box of stuff like that."

"As you were saying," she persisted, "what have we to lose? Come along; it's only a block."

Hagopian screwed his loupe into his eye and examined the ring. "I won't guarantee anything," he said, "but it looks like real gold, and the stone like an uncut emerald. In that case, it could be worth thousands. It would of course take tests to be sure but this is.... Where did you get it?"

"An unlikely place," I said.

"This is pretty unlikely, too. For four or five hundred years, practically all gems used in jewelry have been faceted. Before that, they just smoothed them off and tried to cut out obvious defects, while keeping as much of the material as they could.

"This kind of mounting goes back much further than that — unless somebody is making a clever imitation of a real ancient ring. If you would leave it a few days for assaying...."

"I'll think about it," I said, taking the ring back. Hagopian might be perfectly honest (in fact, I think he was), but before I left anything with him I would check up on him.

Next morning was overcast. When we went for our swim, there was Maniu, half buried in the sand, with just his upper body, arms, and head sticking out. He was ladling more sand over his torso. I asked:

"Mr. Maniu, if you want the sun, why bury yourself? The sun can't get through the sand."

"I have a theory, Mr. Newbury," he said. "The vital essences of the earth soak into one's limbs. You should try it; the vibrations will rejuvenate you. Shall I see you at my concession today?" He grinned at me in a peculiar way, which led me to wonder if he slept in a coffin full of earth from Transylvania.

"If it doesn't rain, maybe," I said.

It did rain, so we did not go boardwalking. Denise wrote letters in the sitting room, while I took off my shoes and lay down on one of the beds for a nap.

Then a rhythmic, squeaky sound kept waking me up. After I had jerked awake three times, I hunted down the source. It came from an aluminum-and-plastic rocking chair on the little terrace of our apartment. Chair and terrace were wet from the drizzle. Nobody was sitting in the chair, but it rocked anyway.

Thinking that the wind was moving it, I moved the chair to a more sheltered part of the terrace and went back to bed.

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The sound awoke me again. I stamped out to the terrace. The chair was rocking again, although there was no wind to speak of. I cast a few curses against the overcast heavens, turned the chair upside down, and returned to the bed.

It seemed to me that I next woke up to find a strange man sitting on the other of the twin beds and looking at me.

He was a man of average size, very swarthy, with a close-cut black mustache. His clothes were up to date but what I should call "cheap and flashy": striped pants, loud tie, stickpin, and several rings. (But, then, Denise is always after me to buy more colorful clothes. She says a banker doesn't *have* to dress like an undertaker). I also noted that the man wore a big, floppy Panama hat, which he kept on his head.

What makes me sure that this was a dream is that, instead of leaping up and demanding: "Who in hell are you and what are you doing here?" I just lay there with a weak smile and said, "Hello!"

"Ah, Mr. Newbury!" said the man. He, too, spoke with an accent, although one different from Maniu's. "Peace be with you. I am at your service."

I stammered: "B-but who — who are you?"

"Habib al-Lajashi."

"Huh? But who—how—what do you mean?"

"It is the ring, sir. That emerald ring from the Second Dynasty of Kish. I am the slave of that ring. When you are turning it round thrice on your finger, I appear to do your bidding."

I blinked. "You mean you — you're some sort of Arabian Nights genie?"

"Jinn, sir. Oh, I see. You were expecting me to appear in medieval garb, with turban and robe. I assure you, sir, we *jann* are keeping up with the times quite as well as mortals."

You might expect a suspicious, hard-headed fellow like me to scoff and order the man out. I have, however, come upon so many queer things that I did not dismiss Mr. al-Lajashi out of hand. I said:

"What does this service consist of?"

"I can do little favors for you. Like seeing that you are getting the choicest cuts of steak in a restaurant, or that you draw all aces and face cards in contract."

"Nothing like eternal youth for my wife and me?"

"Alas, no, sir. I am only a very minor jinn and so can do only small favors. The most powerful ones are all tied up with oil shaykhs and big corporations."

"Hm," I said. "If I knew which super-jinn served which corporation, it should affect the securities of that —"

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"Ah, no, sir. I am sorry, but that information is classified."

"How long does this service last? Is it one of those three-wishes-and-out deals?"

"No, sir. You remain my master as long as you keep the ring. When it passes to another, I pass with it."

"How do you like your job, Habib?"

Al-Lajashi made a face. "It depends on the master, like any other slavery. There is a jinn's liberation movement — but never mind that, sir."

"Is there any way you can end this servile status?"

"Yes, sir. If one of my masters is so grateful for services rendered that he is voluntarily giving me the ring, I am free. But that has not happened in three thousand years. You mortals know a good thing when you see it. You hang on to our service, even when you promise us liberty."

"Let's get down to cases," I said. "There's a concessionaire..." and I told Habib about the purple pterodactyls. "The next time I take a chance with Maniu's rings, I want to win one of those things."

Al-Lajashi took off his Panama hat to scratch his scalp, disclosing a pair of small horns. "I think I can do it, sir. Leave it to me."

"Don't make it too obvious, or he'll get suspicious."

"I understand. Now, sir, pray lie down and resume your nap. I shall not disturb you again today."

I did as he said and woke up normally. I could see no dent in Denise's bed where the *soi-disant* jinn had sat. I did not think it wise to tell Denise about my experiences. Instead, I worked on my speech to Linda's clubwomen.

The next day was fair and breezy. Maniu was on the beach, all buried but his arms and head.

"Good morning, Mr. Maniu," I said. "If you'll pardon my saying so, you give a slightly macabre impression."

"How so, Mr. Newbury?"

"You look as if somebody had put your severed head on top of that pile of sand."

Maniu grinned. "Come to my concession this afternoon, and you shall see that my head is firmly affixed to the rest of me."

So I did. My first three rings stuck at the square sections of the posts. Of my second three, one slipped down all the way. Of my third, two scored. The fourth time, all three rings fell to the base of the posts.

Maniu stared. "My God, Mr. Newbury, you certainly have improved fast! Which pterosaur do you want?"

"That one, please," I said, indicating a long-beaked pteranodon.

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Maniu got down the prize, folded the wings, and showed me how to extend them again. "Come back tomorrow," he said. "You will never repeat this feat, ha-ha!"

"We shall see," I said. I bore my prize home, to the acute discomfort of Denise. She did not like the stares we got on the boardwalk, with that thing under my arm.

The next day, I was back, despite Denise's protests: "Willy, you big *pataud*, where would you put another of those monstrosities?"

"I'll find a place," I said. "This ganef has challenged me, and I'll show him.

And I did, coming away with a fanged *Dimetrodon*.

The following day, Maniu was not in his usual place on the beach. I took another nap after lunch and awoke to find al-Lajashi in the room.

"Mr. Newbury," he said, "shall you make another attempt on Mr. Maniu's prizes?"

"I thought of doing so. Why?"

"There may be difficulty, sir. Mr. Maniu is furious with you for winning two of his lizard-bats. He hardly ever gives one up."

"Stingy fellow! He told me three were won a few days ago."

"He lies. I doubt he has given out one all this season."

"So what?"

"He has rented the services of one of my fellow jann to protect him."

"Does that mean you won't be able to make the rings go over the posts?"

"Oh, I am thinking I can still do it, although not so easily. But this other fellow may make you trouble."

"What sort of trouble?"

"I do not know. But ibn-Musa can surely harass you."

"Why can't you protect me, as the other jinn does Maniu?"

"I cannot be everywhere at once, any more than you can. If he uses a phenomenon on the material plane over which I have no control, I cannot stop him."

"Where did Maniu get his spook? From another ring?"

"No, sir. He leased him from that astrologer on the boardwalk, Swami Krishna. The astrologer's name is really Carlos Jiménez, but no matter. He uses this jinn to make some of his little astrological predictions come true. Are you still determined to try your so-called luck again?"

"I am," I said.

When I bought rings from Maniu and began tossing, the rings did not fly so surely as before. They wobbled about in the air and hesitantly settled over the posts. I spent several dollars before I got

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my three rings over all three posts. When one ring started to fall to the base of the post, it fell partway, started to rise again, and bobbed up and down a couple of times before completing its descent.

Maniu watched it, chewing his lower lip. I could imagine two invisible entities struggling with the ring, one trying to push it down and the other, to raise it off the post.

I walked off with a fine *Rhamphorynchus,* the one with a little rudder on the end of its tail. The waxy spikes of Maniu's whiskers quivered like those of a cat.

I wanted to sail. The day after I won my third prize, I found the boat I wanted. It was a sixteen-foot centerboard sloop, the *Psyche,* which the Ramoth Bay Sailing Club had for rent. Ocean Bay is built on a long spit of land, with the Atlantic on one side and shallow Ramoth Bay on the other.

That day, however, there was a flat calm. Since the boat had no motor, there was no point in taking it out. Instead, I went back to the boardwalk and won another pterodactyl. Maniu hopped up and down with excitement.

"It is unheard of!" he said. "You must have supernatural aid!"

"Don't you want me to play any more?" I asked innocently. He knew perfectly well that I had the help of my jinn — ibn-Musa would have told him — and I knew that he knew.

To tell the truth, I was losing enthusiasm for collecting these bulky objects. I suppose some childish spirit of rivalry kept me trying to put one more over on this con artist.

I surmised that, however much Maniu hated to lose his pterodactyls, neither did he wish to lose the money that my visits brought him, not to mention the publicity. The prizes probably cost him no more than I paid in throwing fees.

Red-faced, Maniu mastered his conflicting feelings. "No, no, nothing like that," he said. "Come as often as you like. I am a fair man."

That evening was the women's club meeting. We got dressed up and had dinner at Linda's house with her and her husband. They brought us up on the local gossip: how one of the councilmen had been caught with his hand in the municipal till, and about the motorcycle gang suspected of local depredations. Then we went to the little auditorium.

I am no public speaker. With a written text, I can give a fair rendition, remembering to look up from the paper now and then and not to drone or mumble. But without a manuscript, rhetorically

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speaking, I fall over my own big feet. This time, I had my talk, written out, in the inside pocket of my jacket.

When the ladies assembled, there was the usual tedious hour while minutes were read, the treasurer's report was presented, delinquent members were dunned for their dues, committees presented reports, and so on.

At last the chairman (I absolutely refuse to say "chairperson") called me up and gave me a flowery introduction: "...and so Mr. Wilson Newbury, first vice-president of the Harrison Trust Company, will speak to you on the importance of trusts to women."

I stepped up, put on my glasses, and spread out the sheets of my manuscript on the lectern.

The sheets were blank.

I may have goggled at them for only a few seconds, but it seemed an hour. I instantly thought: this is one of ibn-Musa's tricks.

Such reasoning, however, was of no help in getting me off the platform. There was nothing for it but to make the speech without this aid. I plunged in.

It was a pretty bad speech, even though I knew my subject. Even Denise, who is as loyal as can be, hinted at that later. But I got through my main points:

"...Now — ah — let me tell you about — uh — reversionary living trusts. Umm. Ah. They combine some of the — ah — features of revocable and — uh — irrevocable trusts. This is — umm — a — er — a temporary trust, often called the — ah — the 'Clifford trust,' after a taxpayer who um — ah — in — uh — 1934, fought the IRS to a standstill. Such a — ah — trust...."

I finished at last, submitted to the insincere congratulations of the ladies, and went back to the apartment with Denise. When I looked again at my manuscript, all the writing was back in place.

Next day, I went to Maniu's for revenge. I got it, too. I came away with *two* purple pterodactyls, leaving Maniu practically frothing with ill-concealed rage.

The following day, since the weather looked suitable, I called the Ramoth Bay Sailing Club to confirm our reservation of the *Psyche*. On our way thither, Denise kidded me some more about the vagaries of English, which insisted on pronouncing the name SIKE-ee instead of the more logical French psee-SHAY.

"I'm sure Socrates wouldn't have known whom you were talking about in either case," I said.

"Willy, darling," said Denise, suddenly serious. "Are you sure you ought to take this boat out? The wind is pretty brisk."

"A mere ten to fifteen knots,

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and steady," I said. "You've sailed with me before, haven't you?"

"Yes, but — somehow I don't think this will turn out well."

I passed that off as a woman's intuition, which is wrong more often than not. People remember the times it works and forget those it fails.

We found the two young men in charge of the boats installing the sails, oars, life preservers, fire extinguisher, and other things called for by the maritime codes. In half an hour we were bowling along on Ramoth Bay under that brisk but soft, steady breeze abeam — a sailorman's ideal.

"Sun's over the yardarm," I said. "Let's break out the chow."

We had sandwiches, fruit, and enough whiskey to make the world look good but not enough to interfere with conning the boat. Denise unwrapped and sorted and poured. I raised my paper mug and said "Here's to my one true love —"

Then, from an easy twelve-knot breeze, it hit us. A tornado or hurricane must be something like that. It came without warning, *wham!* whipped the tops off the little waves, and hit our sails broadside.

I was a couple of seconds slow in starting the main sheet. Denise screamed, and over we went. Away went lunch, whiskey, and all, and away went Mr. and Mrs. Newbury into the water.

Luckily, we came down on top of the mainsail instead of under it. As soon as I got myself untangled from the lines and sail and coughed out the water I had inhaled, I grabbed for oars and life preservers, which were floating away to leeward.

The blast had died as quickly as it had risen. We thrashed around, collected such gear as was still afloat, and held on to the hull, now lying peacefully on its side.

It occurred to me that all my sailing experience had been in keeled boats. Such boats cannot capsize, because the weight of the keel rights them again. A centerboard boat, however, easily overturns when a squall hits it, unless you are very spry at letting out the main sheet. And you cannot right the thing again while wallowing around in the sea.

All the Ramoth Bay sailboats are centerboard, because the bay is too shallow for keels. The place we had overturned, however, was too deep for us to stand on the bottom. There was nothing to do but hold on, wave, yell, and hope for rescue.

Soon the two young men at the club came out in a motorboat and hauled us aboard. They threw some tackle around the mast of the *Psyche* and had her right side up in a jiffy. One of them got aboard, struck the sails, and bailed out most of the water.

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This took nearly an hour, while Denise and I huddled shivering in the motorboat. I do not think the young men had much sympathy for us. At last we returned to the pier, towing the *Psyche.*

It was still early afternoon by the time we were dried, changed, and fed. I took a nap and, as I more or less expected, had another visit from Habib al-Lajashi. The jinn looked grave.

"Mr. Newbury," he said, "I know of your troubles with the boat."

"Ibn-Musa's doing?"

"Of course. Now I must tell you that Mr. Maniu has ordered ibn-Musa at all costs to destroy you."

"You mean to kill me? Murder me?"

"That is what is meaning by 'destroy.'"

"What for? If he wants me to quit his damned game, why doesn't he say so? I have all the purple pterodactyls I need."

"You are not understanding the psychology of Mr. Maniu. He has many ideas that would seem to you strange. I understand them better, because many mortals have ideas like that in my part of the world. With him it is a matter of what he calls his honor, never to let another get the better of him. You have wounded his — how do you say? — your wife would know the French expression —"

"*Amour-propre?*"

"That is it. When someone does that to him, he never forgives them. It does no good to give him back his prizes, or to let him win them back, or to throw his rings for a month without scoring. He has a — what is that Italian word?"

"A vendetta?"

"Thank you, sir; a vendetta against you."

"I guess ibn-Musa really tried to drown us this morning. Luckily, we're both good swimmers. Well, Habib, what can you do for me?"

"Not much, I fear. Ibn-Musa can, by a slight adjustment of the material factors of this plane, bring all kinds of bad luck on you. You step into the street just once without noticing the speeding car, or you neglect a little cut and get the blood poisoning."

"It's up to you to get me out of this, old boy," I said. "After all, you got me into it, in a way."

Al-Lajashi shrugged. "I will do what I can, since you command. But I guarantee nothing."

"Look," I said, "suppose I promised to give you the ring, once I'm home free. Would that make a difference?"

Al-Lajashi pondered, lifting his hat to scratch between his horns. "If you will solemnly promise this thing, I do know one method that

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might work. It is risky, not only to you but also to me. But I am willing if you are."

"Don't see that I have much choice," I said. "Go ahead. I have to trust you, but you have impressed me as a pretty honest jinn."

Al-Lajashi smiled. "You are a shrewd judge of character, Mr. Newbury, but in your business you have to be. Very well, I am starting this project at once. I cannot explain the method, but do not be surprised at anything."

"I won't be," I said.

I was not, however, prepared for the frightful shriek that came from the beach, around three or four a.m. that night. It woke up Denise, too. We looked out but could see nothing.

We finally got back to sleep. I do not remember my dreams, save that they were much less pleasant than having cozy chats with Habib al-Lajashi.

Next morning, the night's events had receded into a vaguely recalled bad dream. After breakfast, we put on our bathing suits for our morning's beaching.

There was Maniu, lying under a mound of sand. He seemed to be asleep. He had buried himself below high-tide mark, and the incoming tide would soon wash over his mound.

"Somebody ought to wake him up," I said, "before he gets a lungful of Atlantic Ocean."

"How pale he looks!" said Denise. "With all the sun he has been getting, one would think —"

She stopped with a terrible

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shriek. I had glanced away towards a couple of kids flying kites. When I looked back, Maniu's head was rolling gently down the slope of his mound.

The head had been set, like a macabre grave marker, on the mound, which covered the decapitated rest of him. A wave of the incoming tide had lapped up to it and set it rolling.

Just how this happened was never established. The police rounded up the motorcycle gang. The tracks of their vehicles were found on the beach, and there were other bits of circumstantial evidence, but not enough for conviction.

I did not see al-Lajashi for several days. When he paid another visit, I did not wait for him to ask for the ring. I tore it off and tossed it to him before he could speak.

"Take it away," I said, "and yourself with it."

"Oh, thank you, sir! *Kattar Khayrak!* You are my liberator! In the name of the Prophet, on whom be peace, I love you! I —"

"I'm flattered and all that. But if you really want to express your gratitude, Habib, you will scram. I want nothing more to do with the jann."

Then I really woke up. There was no jinn; only my darling. The ring, however, had gone.

I drew a long breath. Denise stirred. Well, I thought, this is as good a time as any to prove my manhood again. At my age, one should not pass up a chance.

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The Harlan Ellison letter and the Barry Malzberg article about getting out of sf [both in the April 1976 issue] generated some extraordinarily interesting mail. A sampling appears below:

Recently, while watching a public television program on the Arizona desert, I became aware of the distinct resemblance between the lizards, the squirrels, the tarantulas and myself; and of the analogies between the dry, dry desert and the sf market. My life — my writing career — survives on very little sustenance so far, and the field looks depressingly barren. So it hits me very deep when I see Barry Malzberg heading for the highlands (April 1976, "Rage, Pain, Alienation...") and wince over Harlan Ellison drubbing Cy Chauvin. In the past few months I have watched these people, and Robert Silverberg, and many others, essentially throwing in their towels — not as writers or creative individuals, but as "science fiction writers." Bravo to them all. Some flew over the nest, and all that. But now I have to ask myself why?

I can't afford to leave the field yet. My career hasn't reached the point of diminishing returns, and I find that the biggest aggregate of markets for short fiction (and novels) is still sf. I am young, struggling without great discomfort, and trying to learn the craft of writing. Sf is still the best place on the literary scene for me to do this, because outside of our desert, as Malzberg describes, lie little enclaves absolutely sopping with food and water, but governed by inward-looking, community-bound cowards.

But I disagree with Malzberg that this is a new phenomenon. Read the introductions James Branch Cabell wrote to his books in the Storisende Edition, where he points out the agony of publishing step by step; competition with best-selling novels, all forgotten and completely out of print today; struggles against blind editors, blind moralists, even (for God's sake!) one blind illustrator, Howard Pyle, who threw Cabell off the Harpers lineup! Philistines have always abided, and lived well; and the rest of us have always struggled. My struggle still shows returns on the desert.

Poking about aimlessly for reasons to explain the Exodus, I come across a common element. Ellison, Malzberg and Silverberg all share an acerbic view of the world, heavily clouded with anger, portents of doom, and general distrust of humanity at large. These sentiments fit well into the sixties, when a large number of people felt the curling wave and hopped aboard. But now the wave has broken and most of the riders lie gasping on the sand, getting very tired of saying "See! I was right after all!" We have slumped into a period with many similarities to the fifties — only now, ecology and nuclear energy have replaced the communists, von Daniken has replaced James Dean. The prophets are in the shallows, still splashing, trying to start up more waves. But sooner beat an exhausted horse after a long race. We still need the splashers, Ellison-Silverberg-Malzberg et al, but they're facing a hard slough. I beg them not to retire, saddened. The energy will come again, and they'll be just as necessary, even if older. So go now, rest, try your dreams in other fields, recharge.

But for all our sakes, do not give up creating. If you do, we'll all lose.

— Greg Bear

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Somebody, for God's sake, pass on a kind word to A.J. Budrys for his May book column, which may (coupled with his fine piece on Isaac Asimov in a recent ANALOG) restore the badly dented image of the essay-review all by itself. He is demonstrably our best — most original, most thoughtful, richest and deepest — reviewer; he may be our only real critic, in the best sense of the word. If I have a single criticism to make it's that his tendency to extreme subtlety adds flavor but limits definition. For God's sake don't let him get away, though.

It would be nice to think that Barry Malzberg and Harlan Ellison, contributors to your April issue, might read Budrys's piece and think on it a bit. Mr. Malzberg might begin to understand the predicament in which he finds himself: that of a brilliantly gifted inventor of squarewheeled automobiles, of a racetrack buff who has not only bet the rent money on a three-legged horse, but has had the misfortune to place his bet at the wrong parimutuel window. Mr. Ellison might come to understand that it isn't being typed as a science fiction writer that's holding him back; it's the fact that he'll never be able to grab that second trapeze — the larger audience he wants and deserves — until he lets go of the first one. And the name of the first one is not Science Fiction but Television. Ellison needs to get the hell out of Hollywood. He has gone as far in it as a man of talent, taste and temperament can go; beyond that limit — how many years is it, now? — only the shorted-out cyborgs of whom he complained recently on late-night television manage to advance and prosper. Men of superior gifts tend to go down the tube.

Maybe if both of our April singers of sour songs gave Budrys's taxonomic essay some thought, too, they might in time come to reflect that when one is raped by his enemies (the clique for Malzberg, the tube for Ellison) the proper response is not to savage his friends.

— *George Warren*

I'm a reader, not a fan. Fans are people who join things, beat drums, identify with their subject, create a community based on it. Possibly useful job, but for people who have temperament and talent for it, which excludes me. However, had to write about what's happening, from ordinary reader viewpoint. Thirty years' Constant Readership and so far I've resisted mailing any letters I was moved to write to editors, but something about this has nudged me into wasting my boss's time instead of doing my usual job (finking for the Establishment).

Ellison, Silverberg, Malzberg leaving sf. Malzberg evidently booted. Says he's "loathed and despised" in sf. I don't loathe or despise him, but admit I don't read him much, either. Says he's 'invisible" outside sf because small coterie keeps newcomers out of literary fiction field (makes sense; relatively small market; assume they don't want it spread too thin). Blames no one in sf, and quotes *Richard II*. Makes me feel guilty, as if I were rejecting my Jewish mother's chicken soup (Irish mother? vegetable soup? same difference). Do feel sorry. Always feel sorry for Richard too (II?), but in context old Gaunt right. This realm, this sf, needs new generation of lusty Tudors.

Ellison harder to figure. Crux for him seems to be unprofitableness of good sf and consequent limiting of audience. Valid reason for leaving, but public expression of animus (anima?) very temper tantrumy. (Hope Chauvin

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is a fan, not just a reader, otherwise he took lots of kicks really meant for someone else.) Basically, Ellison asking for intrinsically impossible. You don't get popular ("Jaws", "Perry Rhodan") audience unless you write popular stuff. Saw him on "Tomorrow" show inveighing at Star Trek fans for not preferring "Rich Man, Poor Man", or shows of similar merit. Silly. Ask Marilyn Monroe's posthumous fanship to spend adulation on fine, living actress. Ask Hopalong Cassidy fans to switch to *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf,* or *Krapp's Last Tape.* When people want realism, they want realism. When they want hope, they want hope. Find a way to give 'em both at once. If you can't, don't criticize their choices, which are human need, not literary criticism.

Ellison wants the larger audience. What larger audience? Largest audience I know is the Common Man in middle Amurrica (been reading *Glass Teat* books). Wants "total freedom" in one paragraph, but in others wants large audience and gd jb w mo pa. Illogical. "Total freedom" of artistic conscience not a paying proposition. Without supplementary income, "total freedom" available only to starving poets in garrets, mountain men, self-sustaining homesteaders in pioneer communities, and village idiots. Suggest he go into journalism and become cult object like Norman Mailer to support "artistic conscience."

Feel wind shifting. Spring housecleaning time in sf? Dystopian anomie, literary self-pity, Primal Screams and purely descriptive criticism (This is How It Is, and the Pity of It All), seems to be out. Hope so. These approaches valid in general fiction, but not in sf. They make a poor basis for speculative component of s (peculative) f(iction). Speculation requires hope and faith (if not charity). Trying everything out was one phase. Weeding out what doesn't work is next phase. This will go sour too, when sf gets too conservative and constrictive, or too high on happy pills, but that's for later. World always keeps moving; have to keep eyes open.

—Lee McGarry

The "defection" of Silverberg, Ellison, & Malzberg from the sf ranks has spurred a debate that seems to have bogged down in two questions: Is what they write "really" sf? And, is it "better" than other sf?

These questions can be debated endlessly, but I can see no way that either can be operationally tested. What does seem apparent, though, is that these writers, and people like Delany, Disch, Sladek, and Shea & Wilson, appear to sell as well to the sf audience, and they have all been condemned in fanzines for straying from the One True Path. On the other hand, I suspect that admirers of "Mainstream" writers like Thomas Pynchon, E. L. Doctorow, Ishmael Reed, and Richard Condon, who also deviate from consensus reality, but not in the traditional sf ways, would like these writers if they knew of their existence.

When the map does not match the territory, there is no way of changing the territory and no point in crying about the problem. Change the map. Specifically, I propose that someone think up a new name that will encompass all the writers I have mentioned. (But please, not "speculative fiction." That sounds like something the teacher makes you read.) Any ideas?

May I pick one small nit in Mr. Malzberg's otherwise excellent article?

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Richard Kostelanetz does not ignore Spinrad; he lists him as an essayist. This may be a controversial designation, but it's not an unreasonable one, especially to the few of us who managed to get our hands on *Fragments of America* during the week or so it was in print.

—Arthur D. Hlavaty

I've said it before and I'll say it again: *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* is the only viable medium left for creative short fiction; in other words, whether anyone knows it or not, you *are* in the mainstream, Mr. Malzberg. After all, who reads *Harper's* anymore anyway? Do you really want to write for a bunch of long-haired William F. Buckleys? Is it so important that you make it with this little clique of self-styled elitists? Does their snobbery really render your work meaningless? All this whining around sounds like the kid who couldn't make the football team. And if history judges the literary legacy of our part of this century by the likes of Phillip Roth, Thomas Pynchon, and Saul Bellow, heaven help us all.

—John Wehrle

I read Barry Malzberg's resignation from the SF genre with some regret, not because I am particularly fond of his work — I find much of it too pretentious for my taste — but because I recognized in his words an affliction that seems to be common among so called genre writers, and particularly common among SF writers: A hatred for the field.

That Mr. Malzberg desires to be a member of the literary elite I can fully sympathize with. The literary elite are, after all, elite. They are paid for their status within the elite group as much as they are paid for their work, which is often sub-standard, even by genre considerations. However, being a member of the literary elite will not, of itself, cause Mr. Malzberg's work to improve; will not of itself make something greater of the man Barry Malzberg than he was before; will not give Barry Malzberg the satisfaction of being a complete artist. These things derive from the paper, the pen, the mind and the will. Testimonials, if they come at all, come later.

We are entering a decadent age, I am told. Modern art, literary and otherwise, mirrors that decadence. The artisan is dead, the personal touch has been withdrawn, society is *machined* — and art no longer captures the mind *except* in the various sub-fields, like SF, where artists need not mirror their society so much as themselves. As Will Durant said regarding the so-called dark ages, in the best of times there are evil men, and in the worst of times there are good men.

And any age in which good men and women live and work cannot truly be called dark.

— Richard Taylor

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